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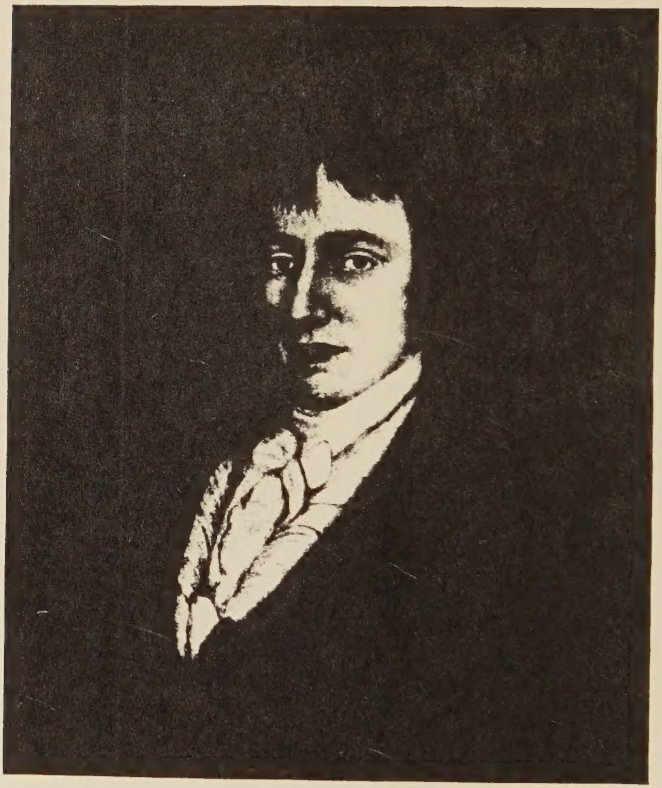

*From the drawing by W. Shuter, April, 1798*

WORDSWORTH

# WORDSWORTH

By

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*With a Portrait*

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## *PREFACE*

The facts which constitute the outer history of Wordsworth are for the most part not in dispute, and the present writer has drawn freely upon the usual sources. But no writer to-day can escape, if he would, obligations to the comprehensive volumes of Professor Harper, and to others who, in our own time, have in some points vitally reorganized or supplemented the traditional record. For such obligations grateful acknowledgment is here made. One obligation claims more explicit notice. For permission to use the original version of *The Prelude*, access to which has been the privilege of Wordsworth's biographers since 1926, the writer desires to offer grateful acknowledgment to the editor, Prof. de Selincourt, and to the Clarendon Press.

# WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

## CHAPTER I

## CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

The twentieth century, so far as it has gone, is commonly thought, not only by those who grew to maturity in the nineteenth, to be even more acutely aware of having superseded its predecessor than new epochs have commonly been. But it is already necessary to draw distinctions. The entire nineteenth century is not dismissed with equal severity, or with equal assurance. And some portions refuse to be dismissed, compel a reversal of the decision to dismiss them, and even begin to recover ground they appeared to have finally lost. The portion which provokes criticism, or calls for apology, is, as commonly happens, that of our immediate predecessors, the 'Victorians'. But the case is different with their predecessors, the men who grew up in the light, or the shadow, of the French Revolution. Tennyson and Browning and Arnold are still read with enjoyment; their power to charm is not exhausted; but in a certain sense their interest is; we have read their riddles, we understand their limitations. Whereas Blake and Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, besides the poetic renown they had already won in the later nineteenth century, possess for us to-day a kind of interest more living than the tranquil

fame of assured classics, the interest of men who compel us to interpret them afresh, whether because new material has introduced new factors which have to be taken into account, or because the simple movement of ideas, the changing 'spirit of the age', has altered the angle from which we view them.

Both causes have contributed to the insistent study and debate which during the present century have gathered about the poet who, of the four, underwent in his day the extremist vicissitudes of honour and derision. Not only does the discovery of the Annette Vallon episode make Wordsworth, as one of his acutest recent interpreters has said, once more 'need explanation'. Not only has the disclosure of the original *Prelude* dispelled some pious ambiguities for which the ageing poet himself was responsible. The more indomitable research, the less easily baffled curiosity, of the twentieth century may claim credit for both. But when, at the height of the war, a great constitutional lawyer proclaimed the 'statesmanship' of Wordsworth; and when in our own day an illustrious physicist declares that Wordsworth's naturalism must be taken account of in any final philosophy of Nature, we recall rather the watcher of the skies who, himself moving, sees a new planet swim into his ken.

## I

The ancestry of Wordsworth foreshadows rather the stubborn tenacity of the man than the originality or the genius of the poet. He derived on both sides from old north-country stock of small landowners or business men. His father, John Wordsworth, an attorney of Cockermouth, was land agent to the principal landowner of Northern Cumberland, Sir James Lowther, his mother

the daughter of a prosperous mercer at Penrith. William, the second of their five children, was born in the Cockermouth home on April 7th, 1770. The house, a substantial stone mansion, still stands on the main street; behind, a long garden stretches to a low terrace, at the foot of which the Derwent babbles by on its way from Derwentwater to the sea. Nine miles away, to the south-east, rises the shapely peak of Skiddaw. Family life played little part in the boy's memories. The father died when he was thirteen, the mother when he was eight; his father he only mentions to record his death; his mother remained an exquisite memory, for

> a grace
> Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,
> A heart that found benignity and hope,
> Being itself benign.[1]

Of his four brothers and sisters, two only, John and Dorothy, count greatly in his life. But Dorothy was nearly two years his junior, John younger still. The boy wandered and explored much alone. The river was his first playmate. Already its murmurs had mingled with his nurse's song; and at five he would spend whole summer days in 'one long bathing', till Skiddaw stood bronzed in the evening light. But soon Dorothy began to run by his side in the garden and by the river meadows, chasing butterflies; he eagerly rushing on like a hunter,

> While she, God love her, feared to brush
> The dust from off its wings.

In after years the sister was to have her full share in the moulding power of that lifelong comradeship. But as yet

[1] Long afterwards, in his ecclesiastical days, he recalls, what *The Prelude* loftily ignores, how she had sent him to 'Catechism', with a flower in his little breast.

the boy's masculine temper had its way. He exulted in daring feats, and he loved the kind of scenery which Nature seems to have provided to provoke them,

> Deep pools, tall trees, black chasms, and dizzy crags
> And tottering towers.

Some of this melodramatic apparatus was at hand in the ruins of Cockermouth Castle; and the boy first knew the thrill of fear when he lost himself one day in the darkness of the dungeon. Bravery sometimes became bravado, as when he deliberately slashed his whip through the portrait of a venerable ancestress hanging in the drawing-room. William, his mother once said, was the only one of her sons whose future gave her any concern.

Yet it is easy for us, with *The Prelude* in hand, to see, even in these earliest days, premonitions of what was to come. The child's acute and tenacious senses, his vivid awareness of the world as others see it, was associated with intuitions of worlds wonderful, unsubstantial, boundless, which his senses intimated but could not disclose. He had in rare degree what he ascribed to all children, the 'wonder' at things of Nature's rarer workmanship, the rainbow, the cuckoo's shout, 'the glow-worm's fairy lamp'; by such things he was 'braced, startled, lifted up on plumes'; and in a long passage discovered by Mr de Selincourt (Ed. p. 552 f.) but not incorporated in *The Prelude,* he traced to this wonder and the 'love and admiration' born of it, the creative source of man's maturer life. But more individually Wordsworthian, prophetic not of poems like 'The Cuckoo,' which others could have written, but of 'Stepping Westward,' where he stands alone, is the instinct which made him also 'from the dawn

of childhood ' love the sight of a road stretching into the distance, when its disappearing line

> Was like a guide unto eternity,
> At least to things unknown and without bound.[1]

But that vivid awareness of the world as others see it, and also this self-forgetful wonder, were subject to intrusions of an imperious intuition of himself, which transformed his sensations, denied their independent existence, or even blotted them out. At these times he felt that

> the mind
> Is lord and master, and that outward sense
> Is but the obedient servant of his will.[2]

To these moments—' spots of time ' in his vivid phrase —he, in *The Prelude*, ascribed the chief ' efficacious influence ', and his life, as far back as memory could reach, seemed full of them. Such experiences were natural moods in the boy whose sense of the indomitableness of the Spirit within him was so vivid that, as he told in his old age, he would ' brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah ', half persuaded that, whatever might happen to others, *he* would similarly escape death; the boy who, ' on his way to school ', would grasp a wall or a tree to save himself from ' the abyss of idealism '. One of these ' spots of time ' belongs to the early days before the break-up of the home. It is too significant to be passed by, even in a brief biography.

Before he was six, when his hand could scarcely hold a bridle, he had ridden out from his grandparents' house at Penrith in the care of ' honest James ', his father's

[1] *Prel.*, XII, 145 f. All references to *The Prelude* are to Professor de Selincourt's edition of the earliest version.

[2] *Ib.*, XI, 271.

servant. They rode past the Beacon, where by some mischance he became separated from his guide in a wild spot. The child dismounted in alarm, led his horse down the rough and stony moor and, stumbling on, came to a bottom where in old days a murderer had been hung in chains. The gibbet-mast was mouldered, but on the turf were carved the initials of the murderer's (in fact it was the murdered man's) name; the letters, always renewed 'by superstition of the neighbourhood', were still fresh and visible. The child, faltering and ignorant where he was, saw the letters, and hastily turned back up the slope. At the top he saw under the Beacon a naked Pool, and nearer, a girl with a pitcher on her head, walking with difficulty against the wind. An ordinary sight enough:

> But I should need
> Colours and words that are unknown to men
> To paint the visionary dreariness
> Which, while I look'd all round for my lost guide,
> Did at that time invest the naked Pool,
> The Beacon on the lonely Eminence,
> The Woman, and her garments vex'd and toss'd
> By the strong wind.

'Visionary dreariness'! The phrase suffices to assure us that the child not yet six, alone in that wild and haunted place, in the presence of the lonely Beacon, the naked Pool, and the solitary wind-vexed woman, already felt the imaginative awe as in the presence of infinity, which solitude and solitary things habitually evoked in the man.

II

The death of the mother in 1778 was of even more than usual import for her children. The break-up of the home which followed meant the permanent estrangement of

some, and the separation for many years of the two who were born to be spiritual comrades. Dorothy was placed with her mother's parents at Penrith, prosperous but narrow-minded tradespeople, where she suffered acutely. William, on the other hand, sent with his elder brother Richard to the little country school at Hawkshead, entered upon the second and principal phase of that 'fair seed-time of his soul'. His boyhood in 'the beloved vale' is the most memorable of all poetic boyhoods; and the first two Books of *The Prelude* reach the highest levels of spiritual autobiography and touch now and then the highest levels of English poetry, by simply recording with perfect fidelity whatever in it bore upon the growth of his own mind.

The school was homely, but of wide repute. The boys came mostly from the substantial homes of those Westmoreland 'statesmen' or freehold farmers, who in after days counted for so much as a stronghold of his faith in the natural goodness of men, and so little as neighbours or friends. Social distinctions may have existed in the school but, as later at Cambridge, they left no impression on the inborn implicit republicanism of Wordsworth. The Church and clergy wielded authority and enjoyed social prestige at Hawkshead, as elsewhere; but the poet who paints them with so much unction in *The Excursion*, ignores them entirely in *The Prelude*. For the boy they did not exist. Who would imagine the Head Master to have been in Orders? And all the other signs of scholastic authority fell away from this Hawkshead dominie in Wordsworth's hands. Lessons were not neglected, but there is scarcely a hint of them in *The Prelude:* it is not there that we learn of the usher whose Latin teaching he gratefully recalled in old age. Yet the formidable Dr. Busby was

as little in the Hawkshead tradition as the Greek scholarship he enforced. Wordsworth's 'Matthew' is not a portrait, but tender reminiscence clearly forms the staple of his picture in the lovable old man 'with hair of glittering grey', who sang his gleeful songs to the boy as they roamed through the April woods together, and to whom he impetuously offered to be a son.

The same simple kindly relations prevailed between 'the school' and 'the town'. The boys were boarded among the cottagers and shared their frugal fare. Wordsworth's cottage dame, Anne Tyson, is one of the most living portraits he ever drew. She treated her boys as her children, watching them maternally as they sat on winter evenings over the glowing peat fire, their heads close together in eager games of cards. More than this, she regaled them with stories. Some of these were tales of her youth, old Hawkshead traditions, like the piquant tale of the Jacobite and the Hanoverian, who found a common haven and a grave in this remote spot. This and other rumours from the great world doubtless thrilled the boy, but were of only secondary moment for the poet. They found no place in *The Prelude*, but emerged later to figure in the secondary poetry of the Parson's discourse in *The Excursion*. It was otherwise with the story of Michael and his Son. How deeply this moved Wordsworth we gather not only from the poem so entitled, but from the original version of *The Prelude* (VIII, 222 f.) where Wordsworth told it, with wonderful force, but at quite unjustified length, only in successive revisions reluctantly curtailing it to the bare allusion of the final text. The story thus heard from the lips of his cottage dame was one of the springs of his dawning interest in Man.

Outside the cottage and the school, too, we can

distinguish different strata in the boy's observation, though all that he observed, and perhaps almost all there was to observe, was touched at some point with kindly humanity. Old, half-witted Daniel and his grandchild, whose pilferings were a daily incident, smilingly tolerated by the little town, touched the springs of poetry in him too slightly to produce, when remembered later in tranquillity, anything more notable than 'The Two Thieves' (1800). Far deeper struck, probably in earlier days, the impression of the 'Old Beggar', whose flickering last glimmer of life brought him so near to Nature and endeared him to men. And the one friend whom the boy seems to have had outside the school stood also, in a different way, apart, the old Scottish pedlar who visited Hawkshead on his rounds, and became the 'Wanderer' of *The Excursion;* pedlar by trade, poet by nature, like the old schoolmaster he loved the boy, and singled him out from his rosy companions 'for his grave looks, too thoughtful for his years'.

That the boy, even in his relations with these older friends, was capable of other than 'grave looks' we may gather from many passages of the early Books of *The Prelude,* as well as from what we may call the 'Matthew scenes' of the *Lyrical Ballads.* The healthy and hearty lad, whose immortality brooded over him indeed, but who could so promptly 'put its Presence by', might well be caught dreaming away his time on a mossy stone, and provoke an 'Expostulation' for neglecting his books. But he was also the boy to 'turn the tables' gaily on the expostulator with a half-jesting declaration that the woodland linnet made better music than all the sages.

The early celebrity of these two pieces has done much to create the legendary Wordsworth who bade us leave

the barren lore of 'Art and Science', as Carlyle thirty years later bade his generation 'close its Byron' and open its Goethe. Neither in boyhood nor at any other time would Wordsworth have accepted that vivacious sally as an expression of his serious mind about literature. He wrote this in the intimate companionship of Coleridge, who claimed, not quite without warrant, to have 'read everything'. Wordsworth grieved for his friend's boyhood cut off from Nature. But he did not 'expostulate' with him for his bookishness; he only glories in the freedom they had both enjoyed to feed at will on the imagination of the past. Certainly he gave fervent thanks for both to have been spared the prescribed diet of Rousseauist educators;[1] but it was because he had been free to forget himself in Jack the Giant-Killer, Robin Hood and Fortunatus.

Thanks to the beautiful trust in her child's instincts, which is almost all he tells us of his mother, he was already steeped in romances when he came to school. In the first week he witnessed what might have been a scene from one of them enacted by the placid lake. A suicide was drawn up from the water 'with his ghastly face upright'. The apparition would have excited a child who had only explored his Cumberland river-side: to the young adventurer in Fairyland all was in order,

> for my inner eye had seen
> Such sights before, among the shining streams
> Of Fairyland, the Forests of Romance:
> Hence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
> With decoration and ideal grace.[2]

And he turns aside to pronounce a qualified blessing on those romantic story-tellers who, in the twilight of

[1] *Prel.*, V, 233 f. [2] *Ib.*, V, 470 f.

childhood, before we are reconciled to our 'stinted powers,' 'make our wish a power, our thought a deed'. It was no doubt sheer delight in marvellous story and brilliant story-telling which attached him so strongly to Ovid's Metamorphoses, that (in his own words) he was 'quite in a passion' whenever he found Ovid, in books of criticism, placed below Virgil.[1]

Was it the boy Wordsworth, one wonders, or the boy Scott, whose 'most precious treasure', at nine, was a thin abstract of the *Arabian Tales* and who, on hearing that there were four volumes of them, a 'scarcely earthly' prospect of bliss, pledged his pocket-money, in league with a schoolfellow, till they had made it their own. 'Arabia' still retained its magic when he was trying to interpret the mysterious beauty of the Solitary Reaper's song. At home in the holidays he threw himself with rapture on the 'golden store' of his father's library. There he read all Fielding, Don Quixote, and as much as he cared of Swift. But the river called, as of old, and now the two passions would meet and thwart one another in the boy's mind, like the warring winds in the Simplon defile. He would go to the bank with his rod in one hand and a romance in the other, fling himself down on the pebbles, read all day long 'devouring as I read', then 'with a sudden bound of self-reproach', turn to his sport.

That 'bound of self-reproach' was impelled by something in him deeper than the sporting appetites of boyhood. He was breaking away from the alluring spell to follow his true bent. Wordsworth was, in after life, not only no ignoramus, but an extremely well-read man in several languages and literatures. But the writings of

[1] Note to *Lycoris*.

other men, though they lived in his memory, were seldom feeding sources of his thought, and still more seldom of his poetry. The range of his ideas bore no proportion to the range of his reading, and the kind of wisdom for which we go to him was distinguished both for better and worse from that which is bred by 'culture' in Matthew Arnold's sense. Matthew Arnold himself, indeed—over a dinner-table at the Athenæum—roundly called the old poet 'a boor'. It was a rough way of putting the same aspect of the truth.

On the other hand, as is well known, it was when absorbed in just such boyish sports as that for which he flung his book aside, that his most original apprehensions of Nature now came to him. The game and the chase were not the cause, nor were they wholly indifferent; they were what James calls 'the matrix of circumstances' in which the experience which they occasioned, but did not generate, was born. To his schoolmates he was no recluse but the keenest of comrades; the moments of vision stole into the midst of boisterous joy in which he shared to the full. A famous and splendid passage describes the winter scene on the frozen lake, when the whole pack of boys scoured over the ice, bellowing like hounds, till the precipices rang aloud, and every icy crag tinkled like iron. That they all heard; but it was only to him that

> the distant hills
> Out of the tumult sent an alien sound
> Of melancholy.

Here there was only the excitement of exercise, and the dying glow of the winter day. The muscular and nervous tension of a perilous climb, without a thought of fear, could evoke more eery effects. When he hung by frail

holds and fissures on a crag over a raven's nest, the loud dry wind in his ear had 'a strange utterance',

> the sky seemed not a sky
> Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!

At times the excitement of the chase was complicated by that of conscious wrong-doing; and then the unearthly sounds would suggest an avenger in pursuit; he would hear

> among the solitary hills
> Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
> Of undistinguishable motion.

A 'severer intervention' than this was occasioned by the famous adventure with the stolen boat, now known to have happened not in the gentle home-waters of Esthwaite, but in the grand and solemn head of Ullswater, immediately under Helvellyn. The 'huge peak, grim and huge', which seemed to stride after him as he rowed away, was a real peak, and its sudden emergence from the midst of these unknown mountains was a real apparition, such as the mild declivities of Esthwaite could not have yielded. The scenery thus co-operated with the boy's imagination, which then as later transfigured but did not falsify it.[1]

But the Power that was fostering him by Fear as well as by Beauty, had not done with him when he had hurriedly turned the boat's head to shore and moored it in its place. For many days after a darkness as of 'blank desertion' fell upon his mind, blotting out the familiar and beloved shapes of things, while huge and mighty

[1] *Prel.*, I, 357 f.; the name as in many other cases is given in the original version, suppressed in the more abstract narrative of 1850. Mr. de Selincourt identifies the 'huge peak' with Black Crag (2000 ft.), which appears due W. from Stybarrow Crag to one rowing out from shore.

Forms moved slowly through it by day and troubled his dreams by night.

In such ways the intuitive wonder, strong in him from the dawn of childhood, was sustained and reinforced in the boy. But fear was never far from rapture, nor either from beauty. The child's thrilled delight in the cuckoo's call from its unsubstantial fairyland grew into that more complex transport with which on gloomy November evenings, walking home by the lake, he saw 'the universal earth' work like a sea

> With triumph and delight, with hope and fear.

III

The eight or nine years of Wordsworth's school-time were outwardly of even tenor. But the inner changes recorded in the Second Book of *The Prelude* were, for a mind so tenacious of its mental habitudes as his, notable enough. Up to about his eleventh year he had felt himself the subject which mysterious Powers were moulding by beauty and by fear. They now became 'Nature', desired and pursued, not as yet 'for her own sake', but as a delightful accompaniment and added charm to the ordinary activities of boyhood—those 'coarser pleasures and glad animal movements' which even on his first visit to Tintern Abbey (1793) had 'long gone by'. The 'coarser pleasures' were indeed harmless enough. He and his comrades came to school with fuller purses and ranged further afield. They went rowing and racing on Windermere, landing with flute and song at the islands with their ruined chapels and lilied glades, or feasting on strawberries and cream on the lawn of smart hostelries by the Bowness shore. Or they would cajole the 'good

old Innkeeper' of Hawkshead to hire out his horses for longer rides than he knew, and then career joyously to the furthest extremities of Lakeland—the Druid stones at Keswick, Coniston, or Furness Abbey. At Furness it was not man's artistry that arrested him, any more than, ten, or twenty, years later, at the sister Cistercian shrines, Tintern and Bolton; but a solitary wren pouring out its song, like the Highland Reaper, as they raced through the ruined choir:

> So sweetly mid the gloom the invisible Bird
> Sang to itself that there I could have made
> My dwelling-place, and liv'd for ever there
> To hear such music.

The words are the mature poet's, but the rapture and the wish were the boy's.

But Nature soon came to be sought not only as a 'collateral' joy to these amusements. It was on one of these excursions, in his fourteenth year, that he first became aware of himself as a living part of Nature, like her, 'receiver and creator both', and connected with her by an actual filial bond, 'interfused' in all men at their mother's breast, but of which in general they remain unconscious all their days.

They had ridden to Coniston. He sat gazing, at sunset, on the red glow over the eastward hills:

> And there I said,
> That eastward glow before me, there I said,
> (Then first beginning in my thoughts to mark
> That sense of dim similitude which links
> Our mortal feelings with external forms),
> That in whatever region I should close
> My mortal life, I would remember you
> Fair scenes!

> 'Twas then my fourteenth summer, and these words
> Were utter'd in a casual access
> Of sentiment, a momentary trance
> That far outran the habit of my mind.[1]

The boy who was moved to such utterance even in 'momentary trance' was already sensitive to poetry, already in germ a poet; and we know that Wordsworth in his fourteenth year was both. He was not, like Pope and Ovid, among the poets who lisp in numbers, nor was supreme felicity in verse ever to be his; but at fourteen he had begun to delight in rhythm for its own sake; and then would come those early morning walks by the lake, when he and a like-minded comrade repeated together favourite verses with one voice;

> Lifted above the ground by airy fancies
> More bright than madness or the dreams of wine,

and made the woods ring with their shouts of exultation at the new power that they felt working in their breasts.[2] And this new power was soon breaking out into verse of their own. Before he left school he had written a poem of 'several hundred lines', many of which, severely (if not severely enough) revised, survive in *The Evening Walk*. A few fragments, including one suggested by the same scene at Coniston, open his collected Works.

At Christmas of the same year (1783) his father died. No close affection had bound them, but the shock was real to the sensitive boy, and it cast a visionary light upon an ordinary experience of his journey home, ten days before. It was a wild and stormy day, and he had waited

[1] *Prel.*, II, version V and U (Ed. p. 564). The first part of the passage was later transferred, with many changes, to Book VIII, 458 f., where it appeared in 1850.
[2] *Ib.*, V, 575 f.

with his two brothers, full of impatience, at a point where two roads met, for the horses that were being sent for them. They climbed a rocky height, commanding a long stretch of both roads, by either of which the horses might come. The scene was rich in the elements which touched the mystic in Wordsworth—a single sheep, a solitary blasted tree, an old stone wall through which the whistling wind made bleak music, and the two roads vanishing into the mist. The boy interpreted his father's death as a divine visitation provoked by his impatience. But when this crude belief had long been put aside, the mysterious solemnity of the scene thus touched with infinity, made it one of those 'spots of time' in his childhood 'to which he would repair and thence drink as at a fountain'.

But he was already capable of standing alone.

> The props of my affections were removed,
> And yet the building stood, as if sustained
> By its own spirit.

His apprehension of Nature became less passively recipient. He became aware that the new power working within himself was also transfiguring the beauty of the natural scene, adding to it 'a virtue not its own'.

> An auxiliar light
> Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
> Bestowed new splendour.

At other hours, walking at dawn by the lake, the real scene itself became unsubstantial.

> I forgot
> That I had bodily eyes, and what I saw
> Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
> A prospect in the mind.

Such were doubtless those moments, already referred to, when 'on his way to school' the boy grasped a wall or a tree 'to recall myself from the abyss of idealism to the reality'. The words are those of the aged poet, long since safe from that abyss, the experience the boy's.

Yet neither that auxiliar light from within, nor those accesses of mystic vision, impaired his keen and delicate perception of natural things. He walked about the roads and hillsides scrutinizing all he saw for similitudes, especially such as were still unobserved, or unapparent to common minds. One of his earliest attempts in verse was provoked by a delightful image of this kind discovered as he walked up Dunmail Raise. His earliest verse, so far as extant, is redeemed from insignificance by its profusion of new and freshly seen images. Not one image in *The Evening Walk*, he declared towards the close of his life, had not been observed by him, 'and I recollect the time and place where most of them were noticed'.

But the most momentous of the 'similitudes' which he discovered in these crucial years, was one which sprang from no such 'analytic industry' but from an instinctive persuasion which took possession of him with irresistible force. Joyous himself, he now glowed with the conviction that joy was at the heart of all existence:

> I at this time
> Saw blessings spread around me like a sea
>
> . . . . .
>
> I saw one life and felt that it was joy.[1]

And

> Man . . . as of all visible natures crown.[2]

[1] *Prel.*, II, 414, 430. The last line was completely falsified in the revision, 'adoration' of 'the Uncreated' being substituted for 'joy'.
[2] *Ib.*, VIII, 630.

Wordsworth, then, at sixteen, reached the close of his Hawkshead schooldays with a poetic culture and accomplishment elementary enough, but with eyes that already saw the world in the visionary light for which he was later to find speech of unique originality and power. Among the mountains where he had grown up he had found springs of joy and of instinctive faith in goodness which had the power of a religion. This religion had come to him not at all by analytic reflection or impassive contemplation. It had begun with imaginings that started into being in the crises of boyish energy and adventure. And it had grown to a living faith through the operation of a sensibility not only delicate, but 'creative', the sensibility moulded and enriched by a mind of original energy, which transformed sensation, not by capriciously distorting it, but by giving access through it to invisible things.

But vividly, even haughtily, self-conscious as he was, he had as yet only an elementary awareness of other men and only a secondary interest in them. Man, he has told us, began to take the first place in his interest only after, in the spring of 1792, he had looked, nearby, on the gigantic struggle of the people of France.[1] And what as yet he knew of Man was touched with the glamour of the mountain background of which in the boy's experience he seemed to be an element. The shepherd on the hillside did not impair the loneliness of Nature; on the contrary,

> Severest solitude
> Had more commanding looks when he was there.

[1] *Prel.*, VIII, 482 f. Wordsworth corrected the original statement 'three and twenty summers' in 1850 to 'two and twenty'. As he was born in April this would imply, as Garrod pointed out, after the summer of 1791; but there is no reason to attribute the change (with him) to any influence earlier, or other, than that stated. See de Selincourt's note, Ed. p. 561.

And thus, when the boy, at seventeen, set out to encounter

> the weight of meanness, selfish cares,
> Coarse manners, vulgar passions, that beat in
> On all sides from the ordinary world,

he went armed with prepossessions which, however superficially illusory, his mature faith held to be premonitions of reality. 'I had my face towards the truth.'

## CHAPTER II

## CAMBRIDGE

Wordsworth's three years' residence at Cambridge (1787–90) are commonly held to have had a negligible part in the making of the poet. And certainly these three years, leaving out of account the memorable, even momentous, experiences of the first and third Long Vacations, cannot be compared in formative power either with the school years at Hawkshead which preceded, or with the sojourn in France which followed. Yet no reader of Wordsworth's own account of it in the Third and Sixth Books of *The Prelude* will miss the psychological fascination of the picture he draws. The boy who had grown up among the mountains, in the intimate and intense companionship of Nature, was now transported to the East Anglian fenland; he exchanged the hardy simplicity and frugality of Hawkshead for the comparative luxury of college-life. He was not insensible to its charm; but no mind of loftier or more stubborn independence ever entered a university, and his first reaction to his new environment was a proud and even defiant awareness of his own strength. He was cut off from the familiar sensations in which he had grown up; once more, as after his father's death, he discovered, thrown back upon his inward resources, that he could stand alone. More, he was free; free to use his strength as he would, and yet proudly bent on using it in the exercise of faculties

which he already felt akin to the creative power of Nature:

> Why should I grieve? I was a chosen Son.
> For hither I had come with holy powers
> And faculties, whether to work or feel:
> To apprehend all passions and all moods
> Which time and place and season do impress
> Upon the visible universe, and work
> Like changes there by force of my own mind.

Hence he was not only 'a Freeman', but

> in the purest sense
> Was free, and to majestic ends was strong.[1]

The first effect of Cambridge was thus not to estrange him in any degree from his former self, but to impel to new energy his ingrained habits of thought. His mind, turned in upon itself, became busier than ever; he walked the level fields, under the 'blue concave', rich in his inner world, and finding signs of 'the one Presence and the Life of the great whole' in the very stones that covered the highway.[2] This first stage, or 'act' as he calls it, of his Cambridge time was thus an early example of Wordsworth's characteristic power of evoking spiritual strength from remembered experience; the power on which he built so confidently when he later explained poetry as recollected emotion, the strength of maturity as mysteriously reinforced by earlier experience in which 'we have been strong'.

At Cambridge, as at Hawkshead, Wordsworth stood spiritually alone. But the undergraduate was, as little as the schoolboy, a shy recluse. He did not even, like Shelley at Oxford twenty years later, isolate himself with a like-minded companion, and flaunt defiantly eccentric

[1] *Prel.*, III, 82 f. (A only.) [2] Cancelled in 1850.

tastes and heretical opinions. The experiences of his wonderful boyhood, which none of his fellows shared or could have understood, did not diminish his relish for their company. 'My heart was social and loved idleness and joy.' If he loved solitude and, as he told Miss Fenwick fifty years later, was 'happy as a lark in his mean and dismal rooms in St. John's', he was not only fond of society, but only loved solitude completely when no society was to be had.

> If a throng was near
> That way I lean'd by nature.

This confession gives a hint of developments puzzling even to intelligent contemporaries for whom Wordsworth was merely the poet of the *Lyrical Ballads*. That 'social heart' beat in his breast from the first; it explains the ease and swiftness with which, when 'Man's hour was come', the dominant interest in Nature gave way in him to the dominant interest in humanity. It explains no less how, with like swiftness and ease, ten years later, the recluse of Alfoxden and Grasmere became (in 1802) the trumpet-tongued prophet of the freedom of nations.

Wordsworth, then, mixed congenially in undergraduate society.

> Companionships,
> Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all;
> We sauntered, play'd, we rioted, we talk'd
> Unprofitable talk at morning hours,
> Drifted about along the streets and walks,
> Read lazily in lazy books, went forth
> To gallop through the country in blind zeal . . .

But he drew nearer, also, to a yet larger society. He was not deaf to the invisible Cambridge of the past, the Cambridge of great poets. Of the four English poets, whom a few years later he was to single out for his own study, as supreme poetic exemplars, three had been associated

with Cambridge, Chaucer by his Reve's Tale, Spenser and Milton by residence. As a poet he did not make them equally his own; but his temperament was rich enough to be exquisitely sensitive to them all. The austere and 'humourless' poet could laugh in the Trumpington hawthorn shade over the Reve's Tale; the 'matter of fact' realist could find the most delicately felicitous phrase for the dream-poetry of Spenser:

> Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven
> With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace.

And it was at a commemoration of Milton, in his reputed rooms at Christ's, that the abstemious poet made (by his own report) his nearest approach to intoxication. With a like mingling of pride and shame he tells the sequel of these Miltonic libations—how the hour for Chapel long passed, he rushed from the gathering, raced through the winter streets, and with his surplice up-shouldered in a dislocated lump clove his way through 'the inferior throng of the plain burghers'.

For such weak hours he implored the forgiveness of Coleridge, as of the spirit of Milton. He knew that this 'second act' at Cambridge had been marked not only by brief and trivial lapses of this kind, but by a definite relaxation of spiritual nerve, for which he found a drastic image from his Hawkshead memories, expressed originally with a fierce intensity later subdued for the public eye:

> Rotted as by a charm, my life became
> A floating island, an amphibious thing,
> Unsound, of spongy texture, yet withal
> Not wanting a fair face of water-weeds
> And pleasant flowers.[1]

[1] *Prel.*, III, 339 f. 'Such life might not inaptly be compared to a floating island,' etc. (1850).

Whatever he took part in it was with sickly appetite. Emulation he declined as proudly as vice. The matured poet of 1804 summed up this state with full insight into its subconscious inner workings:

> Hush'd meanwhile
> Was the under soul, lock'd up in such a calm
> That not a leaf of the great nature stirr'd.[1]

Wordsworth's first year at Cambridge is the part of his career there which is of greatest psychological interest. It is also the part which he has described in liveliest detail and with most penetrating power. The remaining two sessions (1788-90) he dismisses more cursorily in the opening paragraphs of the Sixth Book. From the regulation studies of the place he remained, with one exception, steadily aloof. But he both read more and thought more, and the events, to be noticed presently, of the first Long Vacation at Hawkshead now shed their glamour about him on the Cam, quickening his preoccupation with poetry and his resolve to be a poet.

The single academic study which attracted him was geometry. He disclaims having pursued it 'beyond the threshold', and the interest which drew him was not strictly mathematical at all. It appealed rather to his joy in the pure, simple, enduring elements of existence, to his instinct for what is permanent in Nature; to that which later led him to find a symbol for Duty in the inflexible uniformities of the most ancient heavens, exempt from the welter of passion.

The months spent at Cambridge were not, then, wholly unfruitful. They confirmed his tenacious independence in a *milieu* remote from the potent influences in which he

[1] *Prel.*, III, 526–46. (A only.)

had grown up. And by detaching him from that *milieu* they enabled him to see it with keener apprehension of its quality. But Cambridge laid asleep or suspended more energies than it liberated; and a peculiar interest in Wordsworth's story belongs to the three Long Vacations in which the restraint of college residence was removed. Each was spent far away from Cambridge, and each was marked by a new access of emotional or intellectual experience. In the first (1788) he returned to the scenes of his schooldays and renewed, with added perception of their import, some of the vital experiences of his youth. An entire Book of *The Prelude* (IV) is given to these summer months, and no chapter of his 'Confessions' is richer in charm, in profound touches, or in amusing naïveté. He revisits his old haunts, joyfully escorted by 'a rough terrier of the hills', and exchanging greetings half shy, half proud, with old schoolfellows now less well-dressed than himself. He had begun the habit, later so well known to the neighbourhood at Grasmere and Rydal, of composing as he walked. But these lonely wanderings were interspersed with gaieties, dances, and 'young love-likings'. Frivolities and sublime hours were characteristically intermingled, and sometimes, as in the old days of his boyish sports, the great moments seemed to start out of, to be actually elicited by, the trivial ones. It was thus that the greatest moment of this summer, one of the most momentous of his life, came to him as he returned at dawn from a night of 'dancing and gaiety and mirth'.

> Ere we retired,
> The cock had crow'd, the sky was bright with day.
> Two miles I had to walk along the fields
> Before I reached my home. Magnificent
> The morning was, in memorable pomp,
> More glorious than I ever had beheld.

The sea was laughing at a distance; all
The solid Mountains were as bright as clouds,
Grain-tinctured, drench'd in empyrean light.
Ah! need I say, dear Friend, that to the brim
My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit.[1]

And whether or not that background of warm and eager sociality out of which this moment of vision emerged had any obscure part in provoking it, we know that he now began to look both at Man and Nature with a 'human-heartedness' which was so new, so unlike the lonely, self-centred rapture he had hitherto known, that he felt it like the dawn of another sense.[2] He looked 'with another eye' upon the simple dale-folk he encountered, the quiet Woodman in the woods, the Shepherd on the hills; even his old Dame, nodding over her Bible on Sunday afternoons, stirred a delighted interest; and an old soldier, encountered at nightfall by the highway, on a lonely walk, left upon his memory an impress like that of the Cumberland Beggar or the Leech-gatherer in after days, where natural pity mingles with and humanizes the mystic awe which, for Wordsworth, consecrated whatever had the air of being one with Nature. In all this, there was no conscious effort. His mind unfolded new treasures without any struggle of self-discipline, good things came uncalled for, without having been missed or desired:

A comfort seemed to touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate,
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
At least not felt; and restoration came
Like an intruder, knocking at the door
Of unacknowledged weariness.[3]

[1] *Prel.*, IV, 328 f. [2] *Ib.*, IV, 224. [3] *Ib.*, 143 f.

The second Long Vacation (1789) was less notable. But his few weeks with Dorothy after two years of absence gave a brief foretaste of their later companionship. Together they explored the romantic vale of Emont and climbed the ruined tower of Brougham Castle by a perilous stair,

> listening to the wild flowers and the grass
> As they gave out their whispers to the wind.[1]

There, too, came an old schoolfellow of his childhood, Mary Hutchinson, one day to be his wife, and now, in his own words,

> By her exulting outside look of youth
> And placid under-countenance first endeared.

Less ardent than Dorothy, she had a temperament more naturally and simply joyous. Wordsworth, for whom 'the deep power of joy' was to mean more than either woman perhaps fully understood, responded not less to Mary's quality, and 'youth's golden dream' fell on the hill and crag as they wandered through the eglantine lanes near Penrith Beacon. It was on one of these wanderings that they came upon the scene of that poignant experience of his childhood, already told. That desolate spot, with the mouldering gibbet, the naked pole, the lonely Beacon, had overwhelmed the child's sensitive imagination; and even the poet of 1804 could not find words to describe the 'visionary dreariness' he then had felt. Now, seeing the place anew in the gladness of youth and first love, he found in that visionary memory something that added 'a more divine radiance' to his joy. By this he did not mean at all that his joy was merely keener by contrast with the old desolation. It was the 'visionary'

[1] *Prel.*, VI, 231–2 A.

not the 'desolate' quality of that early experience, now recalled, which gave his joy its finer quality. For the extraordinary consciousness which that ordinary scene had evoked in the child was a symptom that the mind is master of the senses. Hence the memory of that moment spiritualized the gladness of the lover by fortifying the poet. This, once more, was what Wordsworth meant by the power of those 'spots of time' in the past to uplift and upbuild. 'Thus feeling comes in aid of feeling', he comments,

> and diversity of strength
> Attends us, if but once we have been strong.[1]

The third summer (1790) was spent in a fashion which implied a bold and, in a worldly sense, imprudent defiance of university custom. Instead of devoting himself to reading for the degree examination of the following year, Wordsworth yielded to the powerful lure of the mountains, and started with a fellow-student and fellow-mountaineer, Robert Jones, for the Alps. He found himself in a land which seemed to justify his boyish intuition of universal joy. For they landed at Calais on the eve of the first anniversary of the Fall of the Bastille; France stood on 'the top of golden hours', and the whole land as they strode across Burgundy southwards was full of festive rejoicings. The two Englishmen were welcomed wherever they went, for their country had shown the way to revolution, and Cromwell's act cancelled a hundred subsequent years of almost incessant war. They sailed down the Rhone with a company who were returning from the great anniversary gathering at Paris, landed with them at a Rhoneside village, shared the supper and

[1] *Prel.*, XI, 270 f.

the flowing cups and danced with them 'hand in hand, round the Board'.

Climbing thence to the Chartreuse they witnessed another aspect of the Revolution, the 'flash of arms and military glare of riotous men', commissioned, as they imagined, to expel the monks. Wordsworth's sympathies were divided. The voice of Nature seemed to sound a protest against this impious invasion of her solitudes. But the republican in him hailed with exultation this manifestation of the new-born liberty of the French nation.[1]

They had come, however, to see mountains and lakes, not convents, and next day they pushed on into Switzerland. It was no lesiurely tour but 'a march of military speed'. As in his boyhood, Wordsworth's mind received its richest and most lasting impressions when his muscles and nerves were tense. Little was recorded at the time, and thirty or forty miles of stiff walking a day left little leisure for such notes. But the impressions sank deep, and one or two touched his genius to the core. It is needless here to follow them up the Rhone Valley, across the Simplon to Maggiore and Como, thence back by the Upper Rhine to Lucerne, down the Rhine by boat to Cologne, and finally, about the middle of October, to Calais. We nowhere get the fresh first runnels of Wordsworth's impressions of this tour. Much was recorded in a different mood, probably a year or more later, and with embellishments borrowed from a fashion he was soon to condemn, in the *Descriptive Sketches*. Far truer is the presentment of the Tour in the original version of *The Prelude* (Book VI), some twelve years later still. For the poet of 1804 looked back on those experiences of his adolescence from

[1] *Prel.*, VI, 48 A., 440 (1850).

the vantage-ground of a memory which did not distort but sifted and purified, and of a matured power of expression which did not embellish, but made explicit and individual. We already recognize the poet of 'Yarrow Unvisited' in the boy who, on his first view of Mont Blanc, from the Col de Balme, felt only grief

> To have a soulless image on the eye
> Which has usurp'd upon a living thought
> That never more could be.[1]

It needed the spectacle, next day, of the wondrous vale of 'Chamouny' to 'reconcile him to realities'. Retracing their steps to the Rhone Valley they reached Brieg on the Simplon. On the following day (Aug. 17th) Wordsworth encountered an experience which in no mind but his could have generated the sublime poetry it did. For it was one of those ordinary occasions which touched the springs (at once or after a long interval) of his unique power. At the summit of the pass the two young men had missed the track and continued to climb; a peasant sent them back to the path, for *they had crossed the Alps.* These simple words threw the poet into a kind of trance like a cloud, obscuring sight but releasing strange powers of inner perception for which he later found words of amazing and prophetic intensity. For this seemed to him to be one of those 'visitings'

> when the light of sense
> Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
> The invisible world.

'In such visitings', he goes on, doth Greatness make abode,

> There harbours, whether we be young or old.
> Our destiny, our nature and our home

[1] *Prel.*, VI, 452.

Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.

The cloud passed, but the imaginative exaltation, inarticulate as it was, persisted as they strode through the narrow ravine that plunged down towards Italy. Every feature of the scene seemed to affirm that infinity which had flashed upon him through the darkness of baffled sense:

The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd,
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
And everywhere along the hollow rent
Winds thwarting winds, bewilder'd and forlorn,
The rocks that mutter'd close upon our ears,
Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfetter'd clouds, and region of the Heavens,
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first and last, and midst and without end.[1]

The rest of the tour was of a more ordinary character. Wordsworth could, as we have seen, pass lightly to and fro without friction or sacrifice, between trivial and sublime moods; and just as the night of dancing and 'love-likings' had been followed by the dawn vision of self-dedication, so now, the apocalyptic 'characters' and symbols of the Simplon ravine were followed by walks in lighter mood along the vine-festooned paths that wind

[1] *Prel.*, VI, 556 f.

among the villages overhanging Como, where 'dark-eyed maids' tended gardens by the steep wayside. Amidst that luxuriant loveliness he dreamed, as he wrote to Dorothy, of 'the happiness which might be enjoyed on its banks'; whereas in the presence of the terrible majesty of the Alps 'I had not a thought of man or a single created being'.[1] And in the more considered narrative of *The Prelude* he declares that whatever he experienced in this journey had ministered either to 'grandeur' or 'tenderness'.[2] But the passion for humanity still slept. Full of delight in his own recent experiences he looked on the exultation of the revolutionary armies 'on the fret' to liberate the world, as one who already had all the joy he needed:

> I seemed to move among them as a bird
> Moves through the air.

To the Cambridge years, then, in the main so unfruitful for the poet, there belong some of his most overwhelming poetic experiences. They also saw the production of his first complete poem, *The Evening Walk*, and at least the plotting of another, *Descriptive Sketches*. The style of both poems shows him to be still a novice and a novice at once gifted, ambitious, and perverse. Noble examples were available of observation yet fresher and truer than his, conveyed in transparent words. It was a curious wilfulness that led Wordsworth, with the 'simple truth' of Cowper and Burns before his eyes, to borrow the pretentious technique of Erasmus Darwin. Not an image in *The Evening Walk*, he tells us, but he had observed after his fourteenth year; and he boasted in old age that many of them had never been observed in poetry

[1] To D. W., Sept. 6th, 1790. [2] *Prel.*, VI, 675 f.

before. But in finding words and phrases for these images he has still little original resource, and falls back everywhere on the devices and expedients of the current poetic rhetoric—in other words, upon that poetic diction of the eighteenth century which he was a few years later to denounce in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Nor was it only a particular case of phrase or vocabulary that he now adopted and later eschewed. The very principle that the language of verse ought to be distinguished from the language of prose, which at thirty he was so vehemently to repudiate, at twenty he sedulously and undoubtingly applies.

It is an interesting exercise to distinguish the inferior and finer strands in the texture of these poems. Thus *The Evening Walk* records a real wandering, with eager and open senses, through the beloved and familiar Lakeland. Here is a specimen of the rhetorical strand, derived from Erasmus Darwin's 'Loves of the Plants'. It was Wordsworth's faith in ripe manhood that every flower 'enjoys the air it breathes'; but when he tells us here, how

> With secret sighs the Virgin Lily droops,
> And jealous cowslips hang their tawny cups,
> How the young rose, in beauty's damask pride,
> Drinks the warm blushes of his bashful bride,

he is not uttering his faith, but indulging an apprentice's taste for meretricious ornament.

Yet elsewhere Wordsworth has faithfully, if incompletely, expressed what he really saw and heard. This is a night-scene in *The Evening Walk*.

> All air is, as the sleeping water, still,
> List'ning the aerial music of the hill,
> Broke only by the slow clock tolling deep,
> Or shout that wakes the ferry-man from sleep,

Soon followed by his hollow-parting oar,
And echo'd hoof approaching the far shore;
Sound of clos'd gate across the water borne,
Hurrying the feeding hare thro' rustling corn;
The tremulous sob of the complaining owl;
And at long intervals the mill-dog's howl;
The distant forge's swinging thump profound;
Or yell in the deep woods of lonely hound.

The *Descriptive Sketches* stands technically on the same plane as *The Evening Walk.* But it was mainly written almost three years later, and was coloured not merely by the richer and grander scenery which they describe, but by momentous new experiences both of thought and passion, which came to him during his residence in France, to be spoken of in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

## LONDON AND FRANCE

### I

In February, 1791, Wordsworth took his Bachelor's degree and left Cambridge, without any prospects or determined course. He neither sought a fellowship, the avenues to which he had deliberately neglected, nor prepared to enter any profession. He was eager to see the world, and would have chosen travel before all things, had he been rich. His modest means allowed him only to take a prolonged vacation first in London, then in France, deferring indefinitely the earning of a livelihood.

His sojourn in France (Nov., 1791, to Dec., 1792) is one of the most momentous episodes to be found in the biography of any English poet. His residence in London on the other hand is almost a hiatus in the growth of his mind. The Seventh Book of *The Prelude* is entirely devoted to the months between February and November spent there. It was the most solitary time of his life; but solitude in London, if it did not depress, could not inspire and exalt him like the solitude of the mountains. He lived obscurely, sought no society, but ranged at large, 'free as a colt at pasture on the hill'. Yet it corrects some prepossessions about Wordsworth that, being free to choose, he chose to live in the Town at all. London had laid her spell upon his imagination long before he saw her. Already as a schoolboy he had felt the charm

which lends magic to his later vision of 'that mighty heart' lying still on a summer dawn as he crossed over Westminster Bridge. He tells with a certain naïve wonder how a schoolfellow, returning from a short visit to London, disappointed him because he seemed unchanged, bringing no 'beams of glory from that new region'.[1]

Arrived at Cambridge he had himself, it would seem, lost no time in making a rapid excursion there by coach. And now he walked the crowded streets, not certainly with the idolatrous heart of Lamb and as little with his imaginative eye, but also without a trace of the Puritan repulsion of Cowper. There is no hint that Wordsworth, so sensitive to aerial phenomena among the mountains, saw any of the magical effects which a Henley or a Whistler later caught in lyric and painting. But he watched with keen, unprejudiced, and curious eye, the turmoil of the streets, noted the varieties of occupations, race, and colour, and unconcernedly provided offence for modern critics impatient of 'unpoetical' matter by matter-of-fact references to horse-shows, 'a company of dancing dogs',

And Negro Ladies in white muslin gowns.

He loved the theatre, frequented it to the limits of his slender purse, and saw Mrs. Siddons; attended the Law Courts and Parliament, heard great orators and great preachers. But these and other experiences seldom stirred his imagination; they entered only into 'the suburbs of his mind'.

Among lesser orators in Parliament he heard Burke. But he heard him with cold admiration, too politically

[1] *Prel.*, VII, 103. The 'trails of glory' phrase in the great Ode was written about the same time. He later substituted the tamer reference to Fairyland.

immature to be either carried away or repelled by his anti-revolutionary arguments; merely finding their 'transcendent and superhuman' eloquence at last grow 'tedious even to a young man's ear'. The poet of the original *Prelude*, though now very differently disposed to the great orator's memory, saw no reason to qualify this account of his impression. But the current text (1850) not only interposes here a glowing tribute to Burke the statesman, but modifies the account of what the young Wordsworth had actually felt. It is one of Mr de Selincourt's most valuable discoveries that this passage cannot be earlier than 1820. The poet of 1805 faithfully recorded the half sarcastic attitude to the great orator which he had long ceased to share. It was only the militant Tory of the post-Napoleonic time who, not content with rebuking his former self by adding this magnificent tribute, tried somewhat clumsily to persuade himself that he had, in 1790, already listened with rapturous sympathy:

> Could a youth, and one
> In ancient history versed, whose breast had heaved
> Under the weight of classic eloquence,
> Sit, see, and hear, unthankful, uninspired ?[1]

As little did he hear with the reverential approval described in the revised *Prelude*, the 'awful truths' delivered from the Anglican pulpit.[2] The attitude of the Wordsworth of 1791 to the Church is better represented by his sarcastic vignette of the clerical fop, 'fresh from a toilette of two hours', who leads his voice through 'a minuet course', breaks at intervals into 'a smile of rapt irradiation exquisite', and garnishes his discourse with literary scraps.[3]

Yet London did not leave the poet in Wordsworth

[1] *Prel.*, VII, 512 f. (1850).
[2] *Ib.*, VII, 545–87 (1850) are not found in A.
[3] *Ib.*, VII, 546–65.

untouched. If he walked the overflowing streets, oppressed with the 'blank confusion' of those clashing and entangled purposes, he was sometimes caught up, as he moved with the crowd, by a dream-like vision of human life; and once, in this mood, the spectacle of a blind beggar propped against a wall, with a written paper on his chest, turned his mind back upon itself 'as with the might of waters', and he saw in that blind face a symbol of the utmost that we know.[1] And the 'blank confusion' of that 'vast Abiding-place of human creatures' actually contributed to make him aware of the unity of man. For there he saw

> One spirit over ignorance and vice
> Predominate, in good and evil hearts,
> One sense for moral judgments, as one eye
> For the sun's light.[2]

Here a further step was taken towards that passionate apprehension of Man which was to be induced by the spectacle of revolution in France. For the time, Nature was still supreme; even in 'that vast receptacle'[3] the 'spirit of Nature was upon me'. But 'the scale of love was filling fast'.[4]

II

It was not, however, the lure of 'Nature' which, in November, drew Wordsworth away from London. Nor was it sympathy with the Revolution, or a natural desire to look on at the gigantic struggle. According to his express statement in the original *Prelude* he went simply to improve his knowledge of French. Choosing for this purpose the city of Orleans on the Loire, he proceeded

[1] *Prel.*, VII, 607 f.
[2] *Ib.*, VIII, 827 f.
[3] *Ib.*, VII, 735 f.
[4] *Ib.*, VIII, 868 f.

there direct, pausing only a few days at the arena of conflict on the way.

The Revolution had just passed from its opening epoch of salutary and sorely-needed reform, dominated by the Constituent Assembly, to the phase of more and more pronounced Jacobin rule marked by the massacres of the following September, the execution of the King in January, 1793, and the destruction of the Girondists or 'Liberal reformers' in the following May. Wordsworth at the outset walked about in Paris, as he had walked about in London, little concerned for more than the wild hubbub of the streets; he picked up a stone from the ruins of the Bastille, 'affecting more emotion than I felt'.

By Christmas he was settled at Orleans whence he wrote (on Dec. 19) a letter, recently published, to his elder brother Richard. But the forces which slept within this apparently nonchalant onlooker were soon to assert themselves. He was to feel, by the Loire-side, at Blois, in a few months, the call of human pity; and at Orleans, yet sooner, the call of human passion; and passion and pity, never experienced by him in like measure before, were to co-operate in bringing about the change of perspective by which Man, 'in my affection and regards', ceased to be subordinate to Nature.[1]

It is now well known that Wordsworth, very shortly after his arrival at Orleans, became attached to Marie-Anne Vallon, daughter of a surgeon of good standing at Blois. Of this attachment it is commonly held that the story is substantially reflected in the more valuable parts of

[1] *Prel.*, VIII, 482. His original statement (in A) that this happened when 'not less than three and twenty summers had been told' was corrected in 1850 to 'two and twenty', i.e. *before* the summer of 1792.

*Vaudracour and Julia.* The narrative was originally told at length at the close of the Ninth Book of *The Prelude* (A), but published as a separate poem in 1820. A few passages stand out from the context by the intensity with which they express the transfiguring magic of passion; they are too unlike anything else in Wordsworth to have any source but his own experience. A few lines suffice to excuse, even to justify, his invocation, otherwise grotesque, of the poet of *Romeo and Juliet.* For Wordsworth, through that February,

> Earth liv'd in one great presence of the spring.
> Life turn'd the meanest of her implements
> Before his eyes to price above all gold,
> The house she dwelt in was a sainted shrine,
> Her chamber-window did surpass in glory
> The portals of the East, all paradise
> Could by the simple opening of a door
> Let itself in upon him.[1]

The sequel is hinted in the poem, awkwardly enough. The passion of Wordsworth and Annette, like that of Vaudracour and Julia, was swiftly consummated, and a daughter was born in the following December. Annette seems to have left Orleans for Blois, her home, not long after her meeting with Wordsworth, and Wordsworth himself also spent the summer at Blois. But the parallel with *Vaudracour and Julia*, which in Vaudracour's later story clearly breaks down, is a treacherous clue. That her relatives should, like Julia's, forcibly separate the pair, is in the romantic tradition. But whatever intercourse they had at Blois was inevitably secret, and that there were, in fact, furtive meetings, is betrayed by the same test, the glow of memory which animates the lines in which they are

[1] *Prel.*, IX, 586 f. A. *Vaudr. and Julia*, 41 f.

described by a poet in this matter incompetent to invent.

Wordsworth has nowhere spoken of this episode; his official biographer, his nephew, suppressed it, and it remained unknown to the world at large until the record of his daughter's marriage in 1816 was discovered by Professor Harper. But Wordsworth concealed it neither from his sister nor (after his marriage) from his wife, and it is clear that for both Annette was not, as for many English women she would have been, 'the French girl who had been the occasion of his fall', but one who had shared their own love for the man who was dearest to them both. That these two women of exquisite purity and beauty of heart regarded Annette in effect as a sister, does not exonerate Wordsworth, but it disposes of the 'Byronic' Wordsworth, whom the discovery, so tardily made, threatened to thrust into the place of the passionless 'sabbatical' Wordsworth who had so long held the field. The episode gives more value to his statement, more explicit in the original *Prelude* (III, 535 f.) than in the published text, that he had never shared, and but rarely observed, the dissolute pleasures of Cambridge. It proves that we have not to do with a man who walked without stain because he was temperamentally immune, turning with effortless austerity equally from every sensual allurement; but with one whose guard was overcome, for the first and probably the last time, only when the exaltation of passion and of the answering passion of another, made the excitement of the senses seem to be not indulgence of an appetite but a union of souls.

But two questions remain: Why did not Wordsworth marry Annette? And why did he pass over the whole episode in silence in *The Prelude?* It is clear from

Annette's affectionate letters during the period of enforced separation (1792-1802), and the cordial relations between them when they at length met, that marriage, which would have taken her into a foreign, Protestant country, of whose language she was wholly ignorant, would have been for her and her family a wholly unacceptable solution. The subsequent friendly relations of the two families show that it was never seriously urged.[1] It is to be remembered, again, that *The Prelude* is not an autobiography, but a history of the growth of a poet's mind. An experience so intense as his passion for Annette could leave no sensitive man unchanged. But it stands so utterly aloof from the master currents of his poetry, as well as from everything else known of his life, that it was possible for him, without insincerity, to regard it as a passing episode, a moment of tumult which left no permanent trace upon the depths of his poetic thought and feeling.

And Blois, Annette's home, where Wordsworth passed the summer months of 1792, opened an intimacy of more lasting importance for him than the meetings of the lovers. He became friendly with a company of officers stationed there. All were well-born, true representatives of the chivalry of France; all, with one exception, fiercely hostile to the Revolution. Wordsworth vividly describes the passion which convulsed this knot of men each day when the Paris mail came in, reporting the last step in the daily increasing violence of the Jacobins; how one of them, his naturally noble face distorted by hate, and his yellow cheeks fanned into a thousand colours, would shake with fever as he read, while ' his sword was haunted by his touch continually '.

It was in the midst of these antagonists of the cause

[1] See note p. 53.

of freedom that Wordsworth was swept out of his detached unconcern with the struggle. In a well-known passage he tells how the work of the Revolution hitherto had seemed to him too obviously right to be a matter for controversy. Brought up among the 'statesmen' of Westmoreland, where differences of wealth or blood were hardly known, he was a Rousseauist by instinct before he had heard Rousseau's name. At Cambridge he had found, as he thought, not an élite of chosen youth, but a republican brotherhood, where all, if not equally distinguished, had equal opportunities of distinction. He had thus come to France with a 'prepossession' not yet impaired, to feel reverence for Man as such, the awe for the faculties of human nature, which is the moral foundation of 'Equality' as a serious creed. Hence, if the spectacle of the movement of France towards the same condition under the reforming hands of the legislators of 1790-91 excited in him only a tranquil joy, the passionate antagonism to these ideas which he now encountered in the officers at Blois at once provoked him to indignant protest. His slumbering zeal 'burst forth like a polar summer', 'every word they uttered was a dart, by counter winds blown back upon themselves'. They, on their part, tolerated the heresy of the ingenuous young Englishman as they would not for a moment have tolerated it in a fellow-countryman, attempting by kindly argument to win him to their side; with no effect but that of provoking his scorn for these poor creatures, whose reason must have been darkened by a higher power to find the claims of social privilege defensible.[1]

And, out of doors, the young man's heart was stirred to passionate sympathy with the popular cause by all he

[1] *Prel.*, IX, 217 f.

saw. The roads, day by day, were thronged with youths, the bravest and keenest spirits in France, trooping to meet the invading princes and *émigrés* on the eastern frontier. He saw pathetic farewells, devoted self-sacrifice, an ardour of hope and faith which only a just cause could inspire. But this powerful sympathy with the patriot cause might have remained vague and unintelligent had not a remarkable personal influence at this point intervened, his memorable friendship with Michel Beaupuy. Wordsworth has drawn his character in one of the most graphic portraits of *The Prelude*; some traits of Beaupuy may have passed into the picture of 'The Happy Warrior'.

> By birth he rank'd
> With the most noble, but unto the poor
> Among mankind he was in service bound
> As by some tie invisible, oaths profess'd
> To a religious Order. Man he loved
> As Man; and to the mean and the obscure
> And all the homely in their homely works
> Transferr'd a courtesy which had no air
> Of condescension, but did rather seem
> A passion and a gallantry, like that
> Which he, a Soldier, in his idler day
> Had pay'd to Woman.

This friendship was, after that of Coleridge and Dorothy, the most potent personal influence in Wordsworth's career. Beaupuy, fifteen years his senior, and imbued with the social and political philosophy of Montesquieu, brought intellectual articulation into Wordsworth's vague humanitarian sympathy as Coleridge, six years later, did into his visionary, imaginative faith. Together they paced the forests by the Loire, discussing the origin and upbuilding of nations, the meaning of law and custom; and finding confirmation of the inner dynamic of national

life in the uprising of a whole People 'fresh as the morning star', of which they were witnesses. Looking back across the gulf of twelve years, Wordsworth contrasted his sounder political judgment in those days of Beaupuy's uplifting companionship, with the darker convictions induced, two years later, by the spell of Godwin. The precise complexion of their political faith cannot be stated. But it sought both to 'break bondage' and to build up a social order by diffused knowledge, on the basis of a firm and secure liberty. 'Beaupuy and Wordsworth,' says Dicey, 'were in 1792 democrats who hoped to obtain every kind of socialistic reform by means which would have met with the approval of zealous individualists'.[1] But Beaupuy was no doctrinaire. His political idealism sprang from a passionate sympathy with suffering; and his friendship did more for Wordsworth than enlarge his intellectual range; it opened his eyes to facts. He showed him the abyss of helpless suffering in rural France; the mute want which was beginning to find voice in burnt chateaux, but which Burke had wholly ignored. An often-quoted example of it encountered on their walks by the Loire cannot be omitted here:

> we chanc'd
> One day to meet a hunger-bitten Girl,
> Who crept along, fitting her languid gait
> Unto a heifer's motion, by a cord
> Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane
> Its sustenance, while the girl with her two hands
> Was busy knitting, in a heartless mood
> Of solitude.

At the sight, Beaupuy cried in agitation: 'It is against *hat* that we are fighting', and Wordsworth with him

[1] *The Statesmanship of Wordsworth*, p. 32.

'believed devoutly that a spirit was abroad, that could not be withstood, that poverty at least like this would in a little time be found no more'.[1] And these debates on poverty and freedom and the hope for Man, were quickened for Wordsworth by the sense that he was now conversing neither in rural nor in academic seclusion but on the very brink of the arena, and in companionship with an actor in it. How much sweeter, he cries to Coleridge, in recalling this at Grasmere, twelve years later, is the interchange of talk thus on the edge of imminent action, than in retirement such as he and his later friend had known among the mountains or by Rotha side. So little had Wordsworth, destined as he was to spend most of his life in seclusion, of the temper of the born recluse. That contemplation in seclusion was the gist of Wordsworth's teaching, and of the Wordsworthian temper, was a reasonable inference from the tenor and contents of *The Excursion;* and by keeping back *The Prelude* he made that, during his entire later lifetime, the authoritative embodiment of his ideas. Such passages as this disclose his intention in *The Prelude* to show 'that his reflections spring from what is alive', not merely from 'meditation and theories', and that Coleridge, of whom it was far less true, believed this also.

To such facts, undreamed of by the boy in Westmoreland, scarcely heeded or mystically idealized by him in London, but now forced upon him in all their naked pathos by the indignant pity of his friend, Wordsworth responded without reserve, a willing disciple. But his stubborn fibre was not made for discipleship; and on these wanderings by the Loire among the ruins of historic chateaux, the romantic poet in him often slipped away

[1] *Prel.*, IX, 509 f.

in thought from the earnest talk of actualities to the traditional or legendary past. The solemn forest-glades, where you walked for miles among woven roots over moss 'smooth as the sea', evoked his imaginative sensibility like the mysterious grove of yews at Borrowdale in later days. Hermits walked again in these shades, Ariosto's Angelica or Tasso's Erminia careered on trampling palfreys through the woods, or Spenser's Satyrs danced about a captive Hellenore. When the friends encountered in some brookside meadow a convent, dismantled and roofless, his joy at the destruction of monastic abuse, despite his friend's 'heart-bracing colloquies', was tempered by involuntary regret for the matin-bell now silent for ever, and the cross on the topmost pinnacle never again to beacon the worshipper above the woods. Even the chateaux, rife with traditions of feudal crime and licence, excited him to chivalrous delight as often as to virtuous wrath.

And we may surmise that the episode which had recently transfigured his emotional experience had its share in stimulating this romantic sensibility, and in determining its character. The story of the mysterious lady who from her upland tower communicated by love-beacons with Francis I at Chambord in the plain beneath, excited sympathetic interest in the lover who was then himself carrying on intercourse by stolen visits with Annette Vallon. And this emotional excitement found vent also, during these months, however carefully disguised and concealed, in verse.

III

For it was, as Wordsworth has himself told us, chiefly during his sojourn at Blois in the summer of 1792, that

he composed the second of his longer early poems, the *Descriptive Sketches*, eventually published after his return to London, during the following year. The poem is in technique, style, and diction, on the same plane as *The Evening Walk* of three years earlier, with which it is in consequence commonly grouped. Like that poem it is crowded with the stylistic devices of the decadent followers of Pope, and simulates in particular the bold figures cultivated by Dr. Erasmus Darwin. But it is not only the style which is derivative and insincere. Professedly 'describing his own journey thro' France, Switzerland, and North Italy with Robert Jones' in 1790, he has drawn upon another writer, as M. Legouis first conclusively showed, not only to help him to more effective description of what he had seen, but to provide material for describing what he had not seen at all. Ramond de Carbonnières had climbed with a peasant guide in the high Alps thirteen years before. Wordsworth and Jones, athletic as they were, hardly penetrated further into the world of the high Alps than the summit of the Gothard or the Splügen. But in Ramond he found vivid and exact descriptions of the chamois-hunter, winning his livelihood on ice precipices and the like. Such things he boldly wove, with incomplete acknowledgment, into the texture of his *Sketches;* and nowhere is the style more flagrantly false than where he is trying to put Ramond's simple and succinct French prose into really impressive English verse. Wordsworth's Swiss scenery owes something moreover to the descriptions of Ramond's master, Rousseau. And not the scenery only. In this picture of the modern Swiss, who still preserves the ideal qualities of the Child of Nature, he has drawn upon Rousseau to supplement his own

experience which, as he wrote to his sister, was chiefly with innkeepers, and mainly disappointing. The hymn of revolutionary fervour to Freedom, finally, with which the *Descriptive Sketches* concludes, is not only coloured by the phraseology of Rousseau but would have been impossible to Wordsworth before that summer with Beaupuy. During his actual tour he had not only, as he tells us, taken little interest in the Revolution, but had even, 'among the awful scenes of the Alps', had 'not a single thought of man' at all.

In one other point Wordsworth's poetic description of his tour of 1790 has been thought to be coloured by the experiences of 1792, rich and poignant as we now know them to have been. The tourist who wrote cheerful letters home to his sister appears in his verse as a melancholy wanderer, seeking a refuge from misery:

> Alas! in every clime a flying ray
> Is all we have to cheer our wintry way,
> Condemn'd, in mists and tempests ever rife
> To pant slow up the endless Alp of life.

In such passages M. Legouis saw a fashionable pose, an anticipation of the melancholy of the Byronic hero; Mr. Garrod, a symptom of the genuine emotions agitating the lover of Annette. In the light of what we now know the latter surmise appears to be the better justified.

Such explanations add something to the biographical interest of the poem, but nothing—certainly not the virtue of sincerity—to its literary value. There are, however, a few passages in which Wordsworth's acute and powerful apprehension of scenery has forced even this artificial and derivative style to convey magnificent effects. Such

a passage is the sublime picture of a storm at sunset on the Lake of Uri:

> Eastward in long perspective glittering, shine
> The wood-crown'd cliffs that o'er the lake recline;
> Wide o'er the Alps a hundred streams unfold,
> At once to pillars turn'd that flame with gold.
> Behind his sail the peasant strives to shun
> The west that burns like one diluted sun,
> Wherein a mighty crucible expire
> The mountains, glowing hot, like coals of fire.

The *Descriptive Sketches* is, then, a singular example of the work of a young man of original genius still struggling towards self-expression and self-mastery. When published in London, a few months after the execution of the King, its fiery defence of revolutionary Freedom not unnaturally excited the anger of the reviewers. But Samuel Taylor Coleridge, then an undergraduate at Cambridge, recognized in its occasional flashes of splendour the sign that a new and original genius had risen above the horizon of English poetry.[1]

IV

History had in the meantime moved apace, and the patriot cause, threatened by the armies of the kings and *émigrés*, had developed unexpected and formidable strength. The insolent manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick had been answered by the deposition of the King, and the Allies had been thrown back at Valmy by the armies of the new Republic. It was on a calm and beautiful October day that Wordsworth, 'enflamed with hope',[2] left the Loire for Paris. He walked the streets where the September Massacres had raged only a month before, past the prison

[1] *Biographia Lit.*

[2] Wordsworth tempered this phrase to 'cheered with this hope' in the final version.

where the King and Queen lay captive, awaiting the fate which was to overtake them not many months afterwards. He lamented the crimes, but regarded them as 'ephemeral monsters', inevitable incidents in the universal liberation about to follow. But in the night watches, as he lay in his bed in the attic of a great hotel, he 'felt deeply in what world he was':

> All things have second birth,
> The earthquake is not satisfied at once;

a voice seemed to cry to the whole City 'Sleep no more!' and it seemed a place of fear,

> Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam.

And on the very next morning Wordsworth heard the newsvendors proclaim that futile accusation of Robespierre by Louvet, which placed him in absolute power. The idealists of the Gironde were already threatened, but it was in them that Wordsworth saw the men who could alone realize the republican state founded upon equity and reason, where 'the Godhead which is ours', which can never be utterly charmed or stilled, would find complete expression. And so intensely did he enter into these hopes that he was prepared to join the Girondists himself and devote himself, an 'insignificant stranger', to the cause of France. But in December these plans were suddenly cut short. In the final version of *The Prelude* he tells us only that he was 'dragged by a chain of harsh necessity', and the common explanation that his funds were exhausted, or stopped, has been doubted by Legouis and Harper. But the franker original version (X, 191) declares in plain words that he returned 'compell'd by nothing less than absolute want of funds for my support'. Nor had it yet occurred to the Wordsworth of 1804 to

ascribe the harsh compulsion to 'the gracious providence of Heaven' (*Prel.*, X, 224 (1850)).

In December, then, he left France, after a sojourn of somewhat more, probably, than a year. In spite of the suffering he had witnessed, the horrors he had been very near to, the passionate agitation he had himself undergone, we cannot doubt his retrospective assertion that this year was supremely happy. The radiance of dawn still glorified it to his eyes:

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive;

'the meagre, stale, forbidding ways of custom took the attraction of a country of Romance.' All men were busy transforming reality into an ideal, which was not to be in Utopia or in some remote enchanted island,

> But in the very world which is the world
> Of all of us, the place in which, in the end,
> We find our happiness, or not at all.

But the sequel made clear what peril he had escaped, and the moving words in which he refers to that probable fate breathe a humility hardly in keeping with that later assumption of a divine intervention:

> Else, well assured
> That I both was and must be of small worth,
> No better than an alien in the Land,
> I doubtless should have made a common cause
> With some who perish'd, haply perish'd, too,
> A poor mistaken and bewilder'd offering,
> Should to the breast of Nature have gone back
> With all my resolutions, all my hopes,
> A Poet only to myself, to Men
> Useless, and even, beloved Friend, a soul
> To thee unknown.

[1] (p. 43). It is now known that Wordsworth paid to Annette after her marriage in 1816 an annuity of £30, replaced in 1835 by a gift of £400. (Miss E. Batho, *T.L.S.*, April 3, 1930).

# CHAPTER IV

## THE PROBLEMATIC YEARS

### I

Wordsworth's eleven months' sojourn in France had immensely expanded and enriched him. Obscure instincts had become articulate faith; naïve assumptions, passionate convictions; he had formed new ties, private and public, which he now 'reluctantly' severed. But he had not yet known inner conflict. His new experiences seemed only a momentous supplement to those in which he had grown up. Orleans as little as Blois, Annette as little as Beaupuy, meant for him, it is certain, a breach with Hawkshead. That inner concord was now to be abruptly shattered. In January, 1793, the execution of the King roused English animosity to an extreme point, and in a few days the country which he had seen newly endowed with freedom was at war with his own country, where all men were born free. It was the first grave crisis, the first 'revolution' as he says, in his whole experience:

> No shock
> Given to my moral being had I known
> Down to that very moment; neither lapse
> Nor turn of sentiment that might be nam'd
> A revolution, save at this one time,
> All else was progress on the self-same path
> On which with a diversity of pace
> I had been travelling; this a stride at once
> Into another region.[1]

[1] *Prel.*, X, 234 f.

At first his passion for the ideals being actively realized, as he thought, by France mastered all other sentiments. When an English bishop, Richard Watson, once a warm supporter of the Revolution, now recanted, and published a sermon denouncing the republic, the young man of twenty-three replied with an 'Apology for the French Revolution' (which remained however in his possession) at once better argued and better informed than the attack. He looked with sorrow from Spithead at the battleships preparing to sail, and 'exulted' in news of disaster. But anguish mingled with the exultation. If he listened 'in unresponsive silence' to the prayers for victory in village churches, it was with a conflict of feelings for which he naïvely pleads excuse in one 'who loves the sight of a Village Steeple as I do'.[1] It was not only the loyalty of the patriot that was ranged against loyalty to moral law, —'The city of Cecrops', as Mr. Garrod puts it, 'against the City of Zeus'. As Wordsworth saw it, the very loyalties of hearth and home, in which Antigone heard the voice of that eternal moral law, were now in conflict with it.

And unhappily for Wordsworth his 'City of Zeus' itself was soon to be shattered. The triumphs of the republican armies in the field confirmed the rule of the more violent party in Paris; and the Revolution, moving rapidly further from Rousseau's ideal of a community organized to realize the 'general will', confined individual freedom within ever narrower limits. Democracy, which had overthrown the old regime, seemed on the point of generating a dictatorship even more oppressive.

Wordsworth's nature was of a kind likely to be

[1] *Prel.*, X, 292. It is to be noted that this occurs already in the A version, where there is little ecclesiasticism.

peculiarly distressed and bewildered by such a situation. His temperament, vehement but somewhat slow, capable of radiant joy, but inclined to moods of melancholy, even of hypochondria, and his intellect, capable of sounding on through strange seas of thought alone, but neither flexible nor astute, disposed him to meet difficulties by sudden and extreme solutions. Almost at the moment of the declaration of war, appeared a book which was destined to give him for a time genuine but insecure relief. William Godwin's *Enquiry into Political Justice* is still famous, a target for safe and easy abuse. Unsympathetic critics dismiss Godwinism as 'a disease'; but disease is hardly the word for even a baseless gospel which enthralled the élite of the nation's young men, and Bradley has more justly spoken of its 'grotesque but sublime paradoxes'. In a brilliant passage of his *Spirit of the Age* (1825) Hazlitt described the enormous vogue of the book in 1793; "No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country . . . Mr. Godwin indulged in extreme opinions, and carried with him all the most sanguine and fearless minds of the time . . . Young gownsmen of the highest education and promise . . . students at the bar, acute, inquisitive, . . . students in medicine . . ." neglected their professional studies for the excitement of reading *Political Justice*. Godwin was wholly opposed to the violence of the Revolution, and to the political schemes of Rousseau which it had sought to put into practice. But he embodied in glowing periods and in speciously convincing arguments two passionate impulses closely allied to the thinking both of Rousseau and of the Revolution, and gave to both the inspiration of a religion;—concern for humanity as a whole, and faith in the rights of individual man. The second indeed

he sought to realize in a way strikingly opposed to that adopted by Rousseau (in the *Contrat Social*), and partially carried out in the first phase of the Revolution; for instead of seeking to provide a channel for the expression of individual rights by universal suffrage or any other kind of constitutional government, he repudiated government altogether, holding individual reason to be the sole and sufficient source of order. To such a doctrine Wordsworth might well be disposed by what he regarded as the complete breakdown of government both in England and France. But it does not appear to have been this aspect of Godwin's theory which first won his assent. It was rather his doctrine of 'Necessity', which explained crime by the criminal's environment, and thence condemned the intervention of the state to punish him, particularly by death. This view of crime and punishment was enforced, in the following year, by Godwin in his still arresting novel, *Caleb Williams*. That Wordsworth was particularly impressed by this part of Godwin's creed we know from an anecdote recorded by Hazlitt in the essay already quoted: "'Throw aside your books of chemistry', said Wordsworth to a student of the Temple, 'and read Godwin upon Necessity'." We know it on still better evidence from his poem 'Guilt and Sorrow', conceived in August of this year (1793), and finished in 1794. But this remarkable poem—in some respects the key to his later career—also betrays how much that was foreign to Godwinism, and in the end fatal to it, was happening in Wordsworth's mind during this momentous first year of his return.

II

For 'Guilt and Sorrow,' though apparently designed, in perfect good faith, to enforce a Godwinian moral, and

built altogether on the lines of Godwin's analysis of society is only in structure and argument Godwinian. Wordsworth's movements during the early half of 1793 are largely unknown to us, but we know what he was doing in August and September; and in the course of these months he had three experiences, each of which deeply stirred the elements of his nature on which Godwin had least hold. The first and most remarkable occurred in August on Salisbury Plain, where the poem, he tells us, was actually conceived. His mood was dejected. He had walked there from the Isle of Wight after watching with melancholy forebodings those British warships preparing to set out on 'their unworthy service'. The desolate scene with its primeval monuments called up a vision which may be ranked in importance, as Mr Garrod has said, with that earlier experience of his First Vacation, five years before, when the boy had accepted his dedication to poetry. That in this vision he saw a phantom pageant of the legendary past, the Druids and their altar and burning sacrifices, need not detain us. Wordsworth's path in poetry did not lie there. But on that day on Salisbury Plain he experienced an inrush of the faith, never so fully felt before, that he was one of the great company of Poets 'connected in a mighty scheme of truth', but each with 'his peculiar dower', a sense . . . 'by which he is enabled to perceive something unseen before'.[1]

The second experience came during the same month of August. It was not, like the first, an inrush of something new, but a renewal of the vivid emotions of his youth, freed from the crudity of boyhood, and quickened by the fervour of three-and-twenty. He had walked from Salisbury to Tintern, and we know from the great

[1] *Prel.*, XII, 303 f.

poem composed there five years later what he felt on this earlier visit:

> Nature then. . . .
> To me was all in all . . . The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion ; the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite, a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.

This was indeed the time when the eye, as he tells us in *The Prelude*,

> in every stage of life
> The most despotic of the senses, gained
> Such strength in me as often held my mind
> In absolute domination.[1]

And so he gave way, without stint, to the rapture of the climber:

> like a roe
> I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
> Of the deep rivers and the lonely streams,
> Wherever nature led ; more like a man
> Flying from something that he dreads than one
> Who sought the thing he loved.

It is plain from these passages that Wordsworth's new enthusiasm for some of Godwin's ideas had not, in August, 1793, in the least impaired his capacity to respond with rapture to the stimulus of scenes like those in which he had grown up. That it was still a rapture of the senses, one that 'had no need of thought', and was therefore radically at issue with Godwinism, proves the better the power of that inborn sensibility of Wordsworth's which was destined in the end to throw off the incubus of Godwinism upon his genius altogether.

[1] *Prel.*, XI, 174 f.

But this picture of the young man bounding with eager emancipated senses over the mountains, must be read in connexion with yet another experience of the same summer. From Tintern Wordsworth went north to visit his old travelling comrade, Robert Jones, in Denbighshire. Together they set out, one misty night, with a peasant guide, to see the sunrise from the top of Snowdon. The description of this climb at the opening of Book XIII (XIV, 1850) of *The Prelude*, is one of the most impressive in our literature of mountain glory. They climbed most of the way, it will be recalled, through mist, till Wordsworth, who was in front, saw the ground brighten at his feet, and in a few moments stood as it were on the shore of a huge sea of cloud, out of which 'a hundred hills upheaved their dusky backs', while overhead the Moon 'looked down upon the show in single glory'.[1]

That night, afterwards, a meditation rose in him. He saw in that vanished scene the image of the 'glorious faculty which higher minds bear with them as their own', of the Imagination which in the same way creatively transfigures for them the world.[2] However much the phrasing of this and the sequel may owe to the matured genius of the poet of *The Prelude*, it cannot be doubted that the substance of the 'meditation' sprang from the experience of that August night of 1793. But the account of that meditation must be read also in the light of the lines which immediately follow the account of the vision on Salisbury Plain in the previous Book:

> I remember well
> That in life's everyday appearances
> I seemed about this period to have sight
> Of a new world, a world too that was fit

[1] *Prel.*, XIII, 1–66. [2] *Ib.*, 85 f.

To be transmitted and made visible
To other eyes, as having for its base
That whence our dignity originates,
That which both gives it being and maintains
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without,
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.[1]

III

It was with this newly won power of imaginative vision, lifted to yet higher intensity by the experience on Snowdon, that Wordsworth proceeded, during the following year, to work out the poem first conceived on Salisbury Plain. 'My ramble over Salisbury Plain', he declared half a century later, 'put me . . . upon writing "Guilt and Sorrow," and left upon my mind imaginative impressions the force of which I have felt to this day'.[2] We must not then think of Wordsworth, even in the 'despair' to which he confesses, as wholly without a 'counterpoise':

In Nature still
Glorying, I found a counterpoise in her,
Which when the spirit of evil was at height
Maintain'd for me a secret happiness.[3]

All this explains how the poem came to be the astonishing fusion of Godwinian motives and Wordsworthian sensibility which arrested the interest and admiration of Coleridge. It was probably not long after their first meeting in September, 1795, that Wordsworth recited it to his new friend, evoking the judgment, epoch-making for both of them and for the poetry of England, recorded in

[1] *Prel.*, XII, 368 f. [2] *Fenwick Notes.* [3] *Prel.*, XI, 31 f.

substance in the *Biographia Literaria*.[1] We can hardly doubt that that conversation moulded Wordsworth's own account, to Coleridge, of what he had achieved in the poem:

> Nor is it, Friend, unknown to thee, at least
> Thyself delighted, who for my delight
> Hast said, perusing some imperfect verse
> Which in that lonesome journey was composed,
> That also then I must have exercised
> Upon the vulgar forms of present things
> And actual world of our familiar days,
> A higher power, have caught from them a tone,
> An image and a character, by books
> Not hitherto reflected.[2]

What Coleridge, then, found in the poem was a rare, even unprecedented power of transfiguring, without distorting, even 'vulgar' reality. Godwin must be allowed his share in this too. By giving a more definite shape to the sense of social wrong first wakened in him by Beaupuy, he had led Wordsworth to fasten with doctrinaire concentration upon the debris of society; the broken soldier, the vagrant, the thief, the woman driven from house and home because her husband is a fugitive murderer. He had led him to make this murderer a tender-hearted man, urged to his crime by misery, not greed. But what Godwin did not and could not suggest was that these ruined victims of society should meet amid the solemn desolation of Salisbury Plain, with its vast horizons, its long lines of bare white road, almost void of the signs of man, and the huge gaunt pillars of Stonehenge. The scene has an air

[1] The original *Prelude* (XII, 367) states that they were already friends. The statement in 1850 (XIII, 361) that they were then as 'strangers' is due to a confusion with *Descriptive Sketches*, which Coleridge read in 1793. Cf. De Selincourt's note.

[2] *Prel.*, XII, 356.

of mysterious awe which may recall the lurid atmosphere of Radcliffian romances. But its source lies deeper, in the visionary experience which he had himself undergone in that lonely spot. Loneliness in his greatest days was, as Dr. Bradley has remarked, an immediate provocative to his imagination, and so it was already in the painting of this desolate scene: the lonely guide-post on the waste momentarily disclosed by lightning:

> Once did the lightning's faint disastrous gleam
> Disclose a naked guide post's double head.

Or even when he describes only by significant negations:

> No gypsy cower'd o'er fire of furze or broom;
> No labourer watch'd his red kiln glaring bright,
> Nor taper glimmer'd dim from sick man's room;
> Along the waste no line of mournful light
> From lamp of lonely toll-gate stream'd athwart the night.
>
> (Stanza XVI.)

The child of six had already felt awe like this, but the great poet at thirty-five, unlike the smaller but yet considerable poet of twenty-three, found himself unable to describe it.

IV

But between those memorable experiences of August, 1793, which generated 'Guilt and Sorrow', and September, 1795, when he settled at Racedown, lies the obscurest period of Wordsworth's life. The narrative of *The Prelude* here becomes summary and darkly allusive. Our information of his activities and abodes is fitful and intermittent. But it is clear that the course of events both in France and at home tended steadily to sap his faith in the Revolution and the Rousseauist ideals, on

which he believed it to be grounded; and as steadily to drive him to a more unqualified acceptance of Godwinism. The Jacobin Terror in France, and Pitt's persecution of its friends in England, alike gave added plausibility to a system which regarded all government as mischievous. Even the fall of Robespierre in July, 1794, checked the process only for a moment; and the rapture of exultation with which Wordsworth hailed the news shows how much more congenial to his nature was the faith in the Republic, now as he thought vindicated, than the new philosophy to which he was being reluctantly drawn. His description of the coming of the news as he crossed the Leven Sands is one of the most thrilling passages in *The Prelude*:

> Great was my glee of spirit, great my joy
> In vengeance and eternal justice, thus
> Made manifest. 'Come now, ye golden times,'
> Said I, forth breathing on those open sands
> A Hymn of triumph, 'as the morning comes
> Out of the bosom of the night, come Ye!'

For a moment this transport (as he calls it in the final version) seemed justified. The 'Thermidorians' introduced a milder regime. But if the suicidal savagery of the Republic within her borders was checked, she presently began to offend her warmest friends in other countries by turning a war of defence into a war of aggression. Already in September and October (1794) French armies were operating in Spain, Italy and Holland; in Germany they had won, by January, 1795, the whole country west of the Rhine. 'For eight months,' declared Hauffman in the National Convention, February 24th, 'our armies have subsisted on the produce of the conquered countries.'[1]

[1] Quoted De Selincourt, note to *Prel.*, p. 586.

At home the measures of the Government against republican sympathizers abated nothing in rigour. Robespierre had fallen, but the English ministers were becoming, for Wordsworth, Robespierres in their turn; and even in 1804 he could denounce them in terms which anticipate the invective of the *Convention of Cintra* pamphlet, four years later:

> Our Shepherds (this say merely) at that time
> Thirsted to make the guardian Crook of Law
> A tool of Murder; they who ruled the State,
> Though with such awful proof before their eyes
> That he who would sow death, reaps death, or worse;
> And can reap nothing better, child-like long'd
> To imitate, not wise enough to avoid,
> Giants in their impiety alone,
> But in their weapons and their warfare base
> As vermin working out of reach, they leagu'd
> Their strength perfidiously, to undermine
> Justice, and make an end of Liberty.[1]

V

All circumstances in the political situation, in both countries, which might have delayed Wordsworth's full acceptance of Godwinism, were thus now removed, and we may date this full acceptance with Mr. de Selincourt[2] from the early months of 1795. If the planning of 'The Borderers', as a dramatic refutation of it, soon after the settlement at Racedown, marks a definite termination of his discipleship, his whole Godwinian period, in the full sense, will fall between the opening and the close of that year.

[1] The only slightly tempered version of 1850 (XI, 62 f.) should be compared.

[2] See his long and very valuable note to X, 775 f.

But if Wordsworth's subjection to Godwinism was brief, and at the outset reluctant, it is not difficult to understand that he gave himself to it, like Shelley, with ardour for the time. To the individualist in him, the visionary who lived by his own inner light, Godwin's claim to substitute for the proved follies of governments the light of reason within every man's breast, was rather sublime than ridiculous. Completely emancipated as Wordsworth was when he wrote even the original version of *The Prelude*, the glamour of his former faith lingers still in the verses which tell how eagerly he had once clasped this seeming key to all the enigmas of politics:

> What delight!
> How glorious! In self-knowledge and self-rule,
> To look through all the frailties of the world,
> And with a resolute mastery shaking off
> The accidents of nature, time, and place,
> That make up the weak being of the past,
> Build social freedom on the only basis,
> The freedom of the individual mind,
> Which to the blind restraints of general laws
> Superior, magisterially adopts
> One guide, the light of circumstances, flash'd
> Upon an independent intellect.[1]

The 'melancholy' which, he avers, lay as deep in his nature as joy, fed his new eagerness to look on painful things. With a mind 'let loose' and goaded by this fresh curiosity, he took the knife in hand, 'to probe the living body of society even to the heart:

> I push'd without remorse
> My speculations forward; yea, set foot
> On Nature's holiest places.[2]

[1] *Prel.*, X, 820 f. [2] *Ib.*, X, 869.

Believing in the supremacy and infallibility of 'Reason', he trampled on the precious instincts by which and in which he had hitherto lived, and attempted to put everything to proof, and throw aside whatever failed in that test. He was forgoing his proper intellectual path of intuition to emulate, with logical powers immeasurably inferior, Descartes and Spinoza. Abstract speculation was not his gift. Whatever he achieved in this direction was when he was building upon those instincts which he called 'a master-light of all our seeing', but on these he had now deliberately and on principle turned his back. Even when he was, in fact, building upon them, deducing from them conclusions about social welfare or literary practice, as in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, he was liable to aberrations which obscured the insight so imperfectly expressed. His temperament favoured the far-reaching conclusions of logic but he had little either of the resourcefulness which enriches, or of the acumen which secures them. He has described in vivid and pathetic terms the futile gropings which followed:

> Thus I fared,
> Dragging all passions, notions, shapes of faith,
> Like culprits to the bar, suspiciously
> Calling the mind to establish in plain day
> Her titles and her honours, now believing,
> Now disbelieving, endlessly perplex'd
> With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
> Of moral obligation, what the rule
> And what the sanction, till, demanding *proof*
> And seeking it in everything, I lost
> All feeling of conviction, and in fine
> Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
> Yielded up moral questions in despair.[1]

[1] *Prel.*, X, 889.

During the greater part of this time Wordsworth's outer life, as has been said, emerges only at rare moments. In January, 1795, he was near Penrith, taking leave of Raisley Calvert, the friend, now dying of consumption, whose legacy was to make Racedown and Alfoxden possible. But in the intervals between this visit and others of which we have a casual glimpse, Wordsworth was living in London. His purse was light, but he was no longer the solitary and aimless observer of his earlier sojourn. He lived at least on the fringe of the group of advanced political thinkers who gathered round the author of *Political Justice*; a 'circle' still freshly remembered by its later association with Shelley. They included, among others of mark both in intellect and character, Mary Wollstonecraft, later to become Godwin's wife and Mary Shelley's mother, Thomas Paine, Thomas Holcroft, Horne Tooke, Joseph Fawcett, a dissenting preacher of eloquence and power, Wordsworth's friend and correspondent Matthews, and the publisher of his early poems, Johnson. All were exposed to the very real peril of the Government's hostility; several had stood their trial for high treason. Godwin had risked his life by intervening at the trial of Horne Tooke, an action for which many sorry episodes in his later career ought to be condoned. Whether Wordsworth actually met Godwin is uncertain; but we know from his letters that he attended the eloquent preaching of Fawcett. Still more significant evidence, however, of the extent of his immersion in the atmosphere of the Godwinian circle, is the now almost complete suspension of the poet in him, who, some months before, had still been capable of clothing Godwinian material in verse which could ravish Coleridge. If he anywhere found refuge from his vain search for indubitable moral

truth, it was in exploring the indisputable certainties of mathematics.[1]

VI

Yet he was not as a writer completely quiescent. If it is true, as he expressly affirms in the final version of *The Prelude* (and there only), that he

> did not walk
> With scoffers, seeking light, and gay revenge
> From indiscriminate laughter, (XI, 321–2)

this must be understood in the sense that he never indulged in mere mockery, without grave purpose. But it is misleading, and the Wordsworth of 1839 had either forgotten (as is probable) his own past, or drew a remarkably fine distinction between Godwinian scoffing, the 'grave purpose' of which he could no longer understand, and his own.[2] For it has been known for some years that he was willing, even after the settlement at Racedown, to call in the satiric instrument of Pope as a vehicle for the political scorn which he shared with the Godwinians. In a letter to his friend, Francis Wrangham, of November 20th, 1795, he mentions that he is occupied in writing a series of satires, and he later quotes the following among other lines, provoked by the follies of the Prince Regent, who, if any one, was qualified to make it, even for Wordsworth, 'difficult not to write satire':

> The nation's hope shall show the present time
> As rich in folly as the past in crime.

[1] *Prel.*, X, 905. The final version has, more vaguely, 'abstract science', which might mean logic.

[2] He wished, moreover, to vindicate the right use of 'our blessed reason' from his own early scepticism; and hence added the descriptions of 'that strong disease, the soul's last and lowest ebb', which is found only in the final version (*Prel.*, XI, 306–20).

Do arts like these a royal mind evince ?
Are these the studies that beseem a prince ?
Wedged in with blacklegs at a boxers' show,
To shout with transport at a knock-down blow—
Mid knots of grooms, the council of his State,
To scheme and counterscheme for purse and plate.
Thy ancient honours when shalt thou resume ?
Oh shame, is this thy service boastful plume ?
So, modern Prince ! at Henry's tomb proclaim
Thy rival triumphs, thy Newmarket fame,
There hang thy trophies—bid the jockey's vest
The whip, the cap and spurs thy fame attest.

These are not good verses even in their own kind, and it is plain that the vein does not flow freely. But they are not mere 'scoffing', and the just antipathy they express certainly did not evaporate when Wordsworth passed from the heated atmosphere of London to the idyllic seclusion of Racedown. But neither did the disposition to express it in satire at once subside. In 1807 he could peremptorily refuse a proposal from Wrangham to publish the satires, declaring that he had long since resolved to refrain from personal satire. But the companionship of Dorothy, which was to make the 'resolve' superfluous, was a gradual influence, not a sudden spell; and these verses were written during her companionship, perhaps in her presence.

None the less, the settlement with her at Racedown, in September, 1795, not long after the first meeting with Coleridge, is rightly held to mark the beginning, for him, of a new life, his true 'Vita Nuova'. Its opening song is that rapturous pæan, poured forth, as we now know, as he walked from Bristol to Racedown before their residence began, which celebrated his escape from 'the house of bondage'—his many months' sojourn in London

—into the freedom of Nature, which he afterwards prefixed, as a kind of symbolic text, to the epic history of his mind's growth. To this new beginning we have now to turn.[1]

[1] That the 'Proem' (v. 1–45) of *The Prelude* was composed in September, 1795, when *The Prelude* was unthought of, was shown by Mr Garrod, and is confirmed by Mr de Selincourt. Wordsworth himself states that this 'proem' was composed on the very day (*Prel.*, I, 57) of the walk, a real evidence of spontaneity in one 'not used to make a present joy the matter of my song.'

# CHAPTER V

## RACEDOWN

### I

O welcome Messenger! O welcome Friend!
A captive greets thee, coming from a house
Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free,
A prison where he hath been long immured.
Now I am free, enfranchis'd and at large,
May fix my habitation where I will . . .
The earth is all before me: with a heart
Joyous, nor scar'd at its own liberty,
I look about, and should the guide I chuse
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,
I cannot miss my way.

Racedown, where William and Dorothy now at last found a home, is a small mansion, some seven miles from the Channel. The owner, a Mr Pinney of Bristol, lent it rent-free, a generous arrangement which, with the high interest then obtainable, made a life, frugal but not uncomfortable, on a capital of £900 not impossible. The brother and sister, reunited after sixteen years of rarely broken separation, found themselves in a countryside not greatly unlike that which they had known in childhood. If there were no mountains, there were hills of wild heather and bracken, which Dorothy preferred, she wrote, to those which were cultivated, because of that likeness. And there was the sea. Dorothy's letters to her friend

Jane Pollard, who shortly before that September had become Mrs Marshall, give a lively account of the occupations, the housekeeping, and the social intercourse of the household. They also show that Mary Hutchinson, who was to become his wife in 1802, lived with them for some months, and that the story of Annette, with whom Wordsworth continued, so far as the conditions of war permitted, to correspond, was known to all these persons.

Events which mark the opening of a new epoch in the spiritual growth of a man often do not visibly disturb the tenor of his life, and may be quite ordinary in themselves. The settlement at Racedown was not unlike most other removals, and it was followed by no change of occupations. More than this, Wordsworth's occupations during the first year of his 'deliverance' bore the mark of an imperfect liberation. That he was still writing satires we have already seen. As late as March, 1796, he wrote to Wrangham that 'as I now feel a return of literary appetite, I mean to take a snack of satire by way of sandwich'.

Satire was, however, in truth, only a 'snack'. More serious and prolonged labour was given during this first year to a drama, 'The Borderers', which, though intended, as we now know, as an exposure of Godwinism, is so penetrated with Godwinian motives that it has been commonly held to be, like 'Guilt and Sorrow', an example of Wordsworth's continued subjection to it. That view was taken by interpreters so acute as M. Legouis and Mr. Garrod. But Wordsworth's own preface to it, discovered by Mr. de Selincourt, leaves no doubt that 'the general moral' intended was 'to show the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a man has committed a great crime'.

'The Borderers' contains some verses of noble poetry (among them the lines later prefixed to 'The White Doe'), but cannot, as drama, be regarded as other than a monstrosity. The scene is laid in the wild borderland of England and Scotland where governmental law, in the days of Henry III, had no control and the authority of individual reason, for better or worse, no check. The 'borderers' are a band of outlaws full of that natural kindliness which, in Godwin's view, laws and governments alone seduce into crime. The hero, Oswald, once a blameless and happy man, has been the victim of a plot and killed an innocent man under the belief that he is guilty. His remorse leads him through a prolonged moral struggle to a faith in the Godwinian doctrine that all moral laws imposed from without are of inferior validity to the law of individual reason:

> They who would be just must seek the rule
> By diving for it into their own bosoms.

Oswald's fellow-bandits soon find his reasoned justice not easily distinguishable from ordinary crime:

> Natures such as his
> Spin motives out of their own bowels, Lacy!
> . . . . . Power is life to him,
> And breath and being; where he cannot govern,
> He will destroy.

Such passages clearly mark the poet's drift. The crucial situation is Oswald's attempt to involve Marmaduke, a replica of his own former self, in a crime the counterpart of his own. In this monstrous enterprise he brings to bear, with tragical success, the Godwinian morality which condemns pity, as it condemns remorse, even when the supposed culprit is a blind old man. And when we find

that Herbert, whom Marmaduke is thus induced by Oswald to abandon to starvation on a desolate seashore, is not only innocent, but is known by Oswald to be innocent, of the supposed crime, it is clear that the desire 'to show the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a man has committed a great crime' has carried Wordsworth much farther than renunciation of his quondam discipleship of Godwinism would require. If Godwin's teaching is a caricature of the morality founded on reason, 'The Borderers' is a caricature of Godwin. And if Godwin, by sheer intensity of conviction, can be in his prose way sublime, so Wordsworth is here, if not 'continuously' as Coleridge thought, yet at moments, sublime in the great poetic way which he was soon to make his own. As it is, the diction of these too virtuous freebooters may be absurdly undramatic, but the handling of blank verse makes credible that 'Tintern Abbey' is but two years later, and the 'Ruined Cottage' no more than one.

II

Such a poem as 'The Borderers', ambiguous, even enigmatic, in the impression it leaves, despite the intention with which we now know it was composed, may serve to warn us against conceiving Wordsworth's 'restoration' too simply. His language at the opening of Book XI—

> Long time hath Man's unhappiness and guilt
> Detain'd us . . . utter loss of hope itself
> And things to hope for. Not with these began
> Our Song, and not with these our Song must end ;—

suggests a recovery more sudden and complete instead of the process by slow and fitful steps that it really was;

while its Miltonic phrasing, reminiscent of the opening of *Paradise Regained*, and better fitted in fact to announce a new epoch in the history of humanity than in the disposition of a poet, marks the epic solemnity with which Wordsworth regarded, and compels us to regard, his theme.

Wordsworth had, he tells us, two inborn gifts, joy and melancholy; and they could attach themselves to different objects at the same time, and contend for the possession of his soul. Joy had the deeper root, and the stronger support in his physical and mental constitution; it was fed, above all, by the richly stored memory of his boyhood and his insuppressible imagination. It was sure of ultimate triumph, but it could not at once master the very real despondency aroused in him by other aspects of life. The companionship of Dorothy and the presence of Nature from the first inspired a deep delight; but they could not at once dispel the gloom into which he had been plunged by the breakdown of those hopes for Man to which his whole experience up to 1793 had concurred to lift him. During the first Racedown months the two conflicting moods co-existed, or competed for dominance, the new hopes still baffled by the old distrust. This was his state in the Spring of 1796:

> I saw the Spring return, when I was dead
> To deeper hope, yet had I joy for her
> And welcomed her benevolence.[1]

Hence we need little help from psychology to believe both that Wordsworth in these early Racedown months, as he tells us himself, knew despair, and that, as Dorothy tells us, he was 'the life of all the house'.

[1] *Prel.*, XI, 24 f.

But it may well be that had Nature with all its uplifting and healing power stood alone, it could merely have provided, as he says elsewhere, a 'counterpoise' to the despondency. It was the two human allies, Dorothy and Coleridge, whose living intercourse eventually turned that doubtful struggle into a complete victory for the spirit of hope, joy and faith, which was the true and significant Wordsworth.

Of the two who exercised this liberating power upon Wordsworth's genius, it is Dorothy whose part is simplest and most transparent to our scrutiny. Her beautiful nature lies open to us in her exquisite 'Journals,' and she has been portrayed for us by Coleridge and De Quincey, as by her brother, in more expressive and adequate terms than he himself. 'A woman indeed!' wrote Coleridge, after their first meeting in June, 1797. 'Her eye . . . watchful in subtlest observation.' De Quincey, some years later, emphasized the 'exceeding sympathy, always ready and always professed, by which she made all that one could tell her reverberate, as it were . . . to one's own feelings by the manifest impression it made upon hers'.

But we are carried far beyond even these tributes by the several memorable utterances of Wordsworth himself. Mr. Garrod has pointed out what he thinks a discrepancy in them. We should prefer to say that they emphasize different aspects of her influence. In the earliest, the 'Tintern Abbey' lines, written at the close of a day of exalted meditation by her side, he feels the 'wild ecstasies' roused in her by the scenes which she is now seeing for the first time, to be like those he had himself felt five years before; she still apprehends beauty with 'dizzy rapture', not yet with 'the joy of elevated thoughts'.

But Dorothy, as Wordsworth well knew, was not then, or at any other time, just what he had been himself. Her nature, simpler, purer, more exquisite, with tenderer feelings and more delicate perceptions, did in certain ways move in advance where his more powerful, but not clearer, intellect suffered embarrassment and perplexity. If she felt natural beauty in the elemental and passionate way he had once known, it was no less true that her finer senses and her more delicate emotions, at Racedown and later, went before him and showed him the way; and thus, as he tells her in the great passage of *The Prelude*, withdrew him from the sway of the sterner and more formidable elements of his character, the 'beauty that hath terror in it'; thus probably putting back the hour of the hardening and stiffening intellectuality of his last years:

> Thou didst soften down
> This over-sternness; but for thee, sweet Friend,
> My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had been
> Far longer what by Nature it was framed,
> Longer retain'd its countenance severe,
> A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds
> Familiar, and a favourite of the Stars:
> But thou didst plant its crevices with flowers,
> Hang it with shrubs that twinkle in the breeze,
> And teach the little birds to build their nests
> And warble in its chambers.[1]

Yet the final tribute is the simplest, written in the first years of the settlement at Grasmere:

> She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
> And humble cares, and delicate fears,
> A heart, the fountain of sweet tears,
> And love, and thought, and joy.

[1] *Prel.*, XIII, 226 f.

Dorothy's 'Journals', which bear out her brother's tributes with beautiful and naïve unconsciousness, begin only at Alfoxden. She was equally alive to the woods and streams about them, and to the men and women. In her descriptions there is nothing 'precious', nothing abstract, nothing 'intellectual' (for she 'gave' her brother thought by awakening his own); only the simple record of what was seen and heard by those delicately clear eyes and ears.

Thus unobtrusively she helped Wordsworth to a fresh outlook upon Nature. Of a new outlook upon Man there are fewer direct traces. But it is certain that on their walks together (often of twenty miles or more a day) through that Dorsetshire countryside, peopled almost exclusively by poor and simple folk, her feeling heart counted for much in calling out the compassionate instincts of his. And these people themselves helped to sap the Godwinian pride of reason, already tottering, if not overthrown, in his mind. He watched their faces as he talked with them; and 'the lonely roads

> Were schools to me in which I daily read
> With most delight the passions of mankind,
> There saw into the depth of human souls,
> Souls that appear to have no depth at all
> To vulgar eyes'.[1]

Their simple dignity enabled him to believe once more, and with new conviction, that learning and education are not necessary for right living, or for the full unfolding of the capacities of the human soul.

[1] *Prel.*, XII, 163.

III

But it was probably neither the sympathetic insight of Dorothy alone, nor the simple dignity of those Dorsetshire peasants themselves—grandparents of the Wessex folk of Hardy and Barnes—that drew Wordsworth's eyes to this eager scrutiny of homely faces, and allowed him confidently to discover psychological depths within. There is evidence, as Mr. Beatty has shown in his able study,[1] that Wordsworth was now also going to school with one at least of the thinkers who in the age of Hume were pursuing the analysis of the mind.

David Hartley, whose *Observations on Man* had been published in 1749, was probably brought to his notice by Coleridge who, at the time of their first meeting in September, 1795, was his enthusiastic disciple; he had recently hailed him in the *Religious Musings* (1794–6) as Wisest of Mankind, and a little later, in 1796, called his first-born son by his name. But Hartley's teaching was, up to a certain point, better adapted to Wordsworth's needs than to his friend's, and it effected, up to that point, a deeper and more sustained hold upon his thought. For in Hartley he found a recognition, equally firm, of two elements of his own experience, then rarely accepted together, faith in the senses and in disinterested moral emotion. But while Wordsworth had only confusedly interpreted his own apprehension, in Hartley he found his unlike or opposite instincts and a reasoned system brought into seemingly coherent connexion. Hartley still holds a place in the history of psychology in virtue of his attempt to explain all the higher feelings and faculties

[1] *William Wordsworth, his Doctrine and Art.* By A. Beatty. (Madison, 1922.)

of the mind as derived through association from elementary sensations. Himself a physician of wide and keen social sympathies, he applied the physiological doctrine of nerve-currents to explain the evolution of morality, will, benevolence and religion. As distinct vibrations coalesce by repetition to form a new and single vibration, so simple sensations, habitually associated, form complexes of which the elements are no longer recognizable. Human nature thus became a hierarchy in which each higher degree originated in a lower, from which it was in appearance completely detached.

It is easy to understand the attraction to Wordsworth of these conceptions. Newly restored by Dorothy to the possession of his naturally keen and eager senses, and to the perception of their worth for the poetry of his riper mind, he welcomed a system in which the senses played this imposing and fundamental part. And he was fascinated by a theory which, linking the man with the child, satisfied not only his mystical reverence for childhood but also his profound demand for continuity; for a link binding all the seasons of life together 'in natural piety'. 'The child is father of the man' was not a text repeated from Hartley, but it owed something of its clear formulation to the way of thinking which Hartley had confirmed.

Yet there were elements of Wordsworth's nature which resisted Hartley. Deeper in him even than faith in his senses, lay awareness of his thinking and feeling self, and the memory of those times in his boyhood when 'the indomitableness of the Spirit within him' had made him 'unable to think of external things as having external existence' (Note prefixed to the 'Immortality Ode'), did not commend a doctrine which explained all the modes

of that indomitable Spirit as derivative products of that external world. Poetic imagination, which he knew as an inner Vision, that 'half creates', transforming what it perceives, and even in moments of ecstasy blotting it out, was not easily reconciled with Hartley's theory that it is derived from sense.

But Wordsworth's analytic power did not suffice to find a clear issue between these views. They co-existed in a mind far-reaching but not logically acute, as opposite forces, neither actively in conflict nor completely adjusted and reconciled. Each way of thinking had powerful support from without. For Coleridge, who had introduced Wordsworth to Hartley, had now rejected him; and his living influence, from 1797, steadily reinforced in Wordsworth the idealist, for whom mind is paramount, while never wholly subduing the sensationalist, for whom the senses are fundamental.

Hartley must, however, be counted a chief influence on the intellectual side in Wordsworth's recovery of faith in Nature and hope for Man. He had explained Man by the operation of natural laws, which at the same time drew him to goodness and happiness. And thus, he says, in glowing but majestic words at the opening of Book XII:

> Now
> On all sides day began to reappear,
> And it was proved indeed that not in vain
> I had been taught to reverence a Power
> That is the very quality and shape
> And image of right reason; that matures
> Her processes by steadfast laws, gives birth
> To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
> No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
> No vain conceits, provokes to no quick turns

Of self-applauding intellect, but lifts
The Being into magnanimity.[1]

IV

The most notable fruit of this renewed and enriched vision of Man were the two poems, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and 'The Ruined Cottage'. The 'passiveness' which leaves us open to receive the benign impressions of Nature, and thus approximates us to her, was for Wordsworth consecrated by that approximation, even where it neither proceeded from, nor could induce, wisdom. Hence the Old Beggar, remembered from his childhood but seen in the light of his recovered vision, a mere glimmering ruin of humanity, is glorified for Wordsworth because he has lived, and will die, 'in the eye of Nature'. That mystic consummation transcended Dorothy's simple thought. But in the exquisitely delicate picture of the helpless old man, as he sits by the wayside involuntarily sharing his poor scraps of food with the eager birds, we discern the companion of her walks along the Dorset lanes, describing with a touch like hers what he saw with 'the eyes she gave'.

The same delicate observation is seen in the painting of neglect and decay in the garden of the Ruined Cottage:

I withdrew,
And once again, entering the garden, saw
More plainly still, that poverty and grief
Were now come nearer to her: weeds defaced
The hardened soil, and knots of withered grass:
No ridges there appeared of clear black mould,

[1] *Prel.*, XII, 20 f. The last line put the faith in Humanity too boldly for the later Wordsworth, and was replaced by: 'trains to meekness and exalts to humble faith' (XIII, 27).

> No winter greenness; of her herbs and flowers
> It seemed the better part was gnawed away
> Or trampled into earth; a chain of straw,
> Which had been twined about the slender stem
> Of a young apple-tree, lay at its root;
> The bark was nibbled round by truant sheep.

But Wordsworth had learnt, in Dorothy's companionship, much more than this delicate perception of outward things. He is keenly alive now to 'humble cares', to the sufferings of lowly folk; and to their suffering not only, as when he watched it by the Loire, *as* suffering; but as it is evoked by, or evokes, the affections of the human heart. The Old Beggar, hallowed by his nearness to Nature, was precious to him also because his helplessness kept alive the compassion of Man. The house-wife gave him of her slender store of meal, the horseman and the post-boy stopped and turned aside when they met him. The story of Margaret is a tragedy in which nothing whatever happens but the slow disintegration of a woman's happiness and of all the outward signs of it, as she watches for a husband who does not come. To this, even more fittingly than to 'The White Doe,' the motto from 'The Borderers' might have been prefixed:

> Action is transitory, a word, a blow,
> 'Tis done, . . .
> Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
> And has the nature of infinity.

Far better than 'The Borderers', written not long before, expressly to expose Godwinism, 'The Ruined Cottage' shows how far Wordsworth had travelled from it. There we saw him trying by a clumsily fabricated tragedy to prove the futility of sole reliance on reason.

Here he elicits far more moving tragedy from the picture of a slow-breaking heart.

The new poetry evoked by Wordsworth's restoration was already fully manifested in one consummate example. More than any of the *Lyrical Ballads*, 'The Ruined Cottage' reflects the enduring elements of the purpose and inspiration to which they were due. And the most momentous and significant day in the whole period of almost two years at Racedown was that, in June, 1797, on which Wordsworth recited it to the brother poet who was to be his companion in that creative enterprise.

On this visit, a red-letter day in both their lives, in the life of Dorothy, and in the history of English poetry, it is fitting to dwell for a moment. Coleridge had been Wordsworth's friend since 1795; he now saw Dorothy for the first time. She describes his arrival and her first impressions in a memorable and often-quoted letter: 'At first I thought him very plain—that is for about three minutes. He is pale and thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish, loose-growing, half-curling, rough black hair. But if you hear him speak for five minutes you think no more of them. His eye is large and full, not dark but grey; such an eye as would receive from a heavy soul the dullest expression, but it speaks every emotion of his animated mind. It has more of the "poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling" than I ever witnessed. He has fine dark eyebrows and an overhanging forehead.'

At this meeting both 'The Borderers' and 'The Ruined Cottage' were recited to Coleridge, and he received both with profound and unqualified admiration. 'Wordsworth's drama', he wrote to Cottle immediately after the visit, 'is absolutely wonderful'. 'The Ruined Cottage'

he thought the finest poem of its kind and length in the language. The poet himself, he declared, 'speaking with heart-felt sincerity', in the same letter to Cottle, to be the greatest man he ever knew. That a critic of Coleridge's calibre should ignore the glaring defects of 'The Borderers' may surprise us. But poetry as yet spoke to Coleridge in many keys and moods with equally convincing power. 'The Borderers' stirred the man who not long before had been lifted by *The Robbers* of Schiller to a rapture only relatively more defensible. 'The Ruined Cottage' summoned into clearer consciousness that deeper strain in Wordsworth which was to clarify and fortify the genius of his friend, and marked the definite liberation of his own.

Of the impression left upon him by this meeting his more reticent nature has left no such explicit evidence. But none is needed. For within a month the Racedown household was broken up, and Wordsworth and Dorothy, in order to be near Coleridge, had settled at Alfoxden, some three miles from his cottage at Nether Stowey.

## CHAPTER VI

## ALFOXDEN

### I

Coleridge's cottage still stands in the village street of Nether Stowey, a hamlet in a fold of the Quantocks. Wordsworth and his sister were able to settle with more amenity in a mansion and park let to them, through friendly offices, at a nominal rent. Alfoxden became their home for the next thirteen months.

If Racedown had given Wordsworth the lonely seclusion of the country, at Alfoxden he found in addition luxuriant rural beauty. Racedown had little natural charm, but Dorothy writes of Alfoxden on the morrow of their visit: 'There is everything here; sea, woods, wild as fancy ever painted, brooks clear and pebbly as in Cumberland, villages as romantic; and William and I, in a wander by ourselves, found out a sequestered waterfall in a dell formed by a steep hill covered with full-grown timber trees. The woods are as fine as those at Lowther, and the country more romantic; it has the character of the less grand parts of the neighbourhood of the Lakes.'

But the feature of cardinal importance for Wordsworth at Alfoxden was not the richer beauty of the scenery. No other man had upon Wordsworth an influence comparable to that of the friend who now became

his close and constant companion; nor are there in the known history of literature many examples of shaping and moulding influence, of equal importance, mutually exercised by minds of comparable power. The case of Goethe and Schiller (whose intimacy had begun three years before) is the nearest parallel in modern literature.

Profoundly unlike in temperament, and in the circumstances of their up-bringing, the two men had reached when they first met a position in which their intimacy was alike momentous for both. The woodland beauty of Coleridge's Devonshire birthplace had less share in moulding his precocious boyhood than the fairy tales he pored over, and the stars which his father taught him to watch and name. 'I heard him', Coleridge tells us, 'with a profound delight . . . but without the least mixture of wonder or incredulity. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions, not by my sight, even at that age.' His school years at Christ's Hospital, 1782–91, powerfully fostered this characteristic, starving all those sensibilities of eye and ear which had been so acutely stimulated in Wordsworth at Hawkshead, and with which Coleridge was nevertheless even more richly endowed. Both men were keenly alive to this difference and its consequences. 'Debarred from Nature's living images', wrote Wordsworth in the memorable tribute to Coleridge in *The Prelude*—save for gazing on the moving clouds from the leads—he fed with eager curiosity on philosophic speculation about Nature; plunged into the mystic depths of Plotinus, and watched entranced the anatomical adventures of the surgeon's knife. He was already the 'Logician, Metaphysician, Bard' that Lamb, his schoolfellow, called him, when he entered Cambridge, a year after Wordsworth's departure. There he hailed the

young dawn of the Revolution with the shrill ecstatic vehemence of one to whom it was a sudden discovery, not, as to Wordsworth, the confirmation of an axiomatic faith. In a series of loosely-strung and rhetorically-phrased political sonnets, he extolled Priestley and Godwin, denounced Pitt, and patronized Burke. The poet in him was more unequivocally disclosed in the rich sensuous music and delicate faerie of the 'Song of the Pixies'. But his most imposing achievement so far was the essay in religious metaphysics, *Religious Musings* (1794–6), an attempted solution of the problem which eternally haunts minds of his type, how to interpret matter in terms of mind, and both in terms of religion. The universe was 'ebullient with creative deity', pervaded by 'an organizing surge' of vital energies which emanate directly from God. 'Some nurse the infant diamond in the mine, some roll the genial juices through the oak'. The monad theory is unfolded in grandiose phrase. The Revolution receives its metaphysical quasi-justification as the triumph of infinite Love, which 'diffused through all makes all one whole'. And though the manner swells too loftily, partly under the contagion of Schiller's *The Robbers*, which he had hailed in a rapturous sonnet, and the style bristles with the syntactical audacities of the literary rebel, the poem is strewn with rich poetic material; and here and there the storm and stress cease, and the senses are steeped in visions of romantic loveliness. Coleridge, both in verse and in speech, already commanded both a rushing eloquence and a lyric sweetness, always beyond Wordsworth's reach; he knew vastly more, well-read as Wordsworth was, and his brilliant, apprehensive and plastic intellect made him easily master of the whole universe of speculation; where Wordsworth's mind,

tenacious when his was adventurous, admitted with difficulty the intrusion of alien ideas, and drew its most vital thinking from the interpretation of his own experience. The impact of Coleridge might have swept a smaller or a more lightly built man off his feet. On Wordsworth it acted by bringing into more vivid and dynamic consciousness ideas and impulses already latent.

Our clues to the talk which went on daily between the friends as they paced the heather and bracken-clad slopes which lay between the two households, are mainly derived from the graphic account given by Coleridge, twenty years later, in the *Biographia Literaria*. But this describes chiefly a single one of their literary activities; the one in which both poets were concerned, and which bore immediate literary fruit.

The lively discussion which the *Lyrical Ballads* at once provoked and which has in a sense never ceased, has somewhat obscured the fact that to the two poets themselves the project of the Ballads was something of an experiment, an adventure, amongst other and deeper pre-occupations. Ballads, however consummate, could never be adequate to the larger aims of poetry, poetry as understood by the sublime intelligence of Milton; for it is clear that Milton's thought and example were, even among the great poets, predominant in Wordsworth's mind. A poet of Milton's kind, perhaps of Milton's rank, Wordsworth now, with a conviction obscure but not to be put by, felt that he was. For a poem of epic scale and dignity, he felt himself adequately equipped both with 'that first great gift, the vital soul', and with images and observation and other 'subordinate helpers of the living mind'. But like Milton, and again with Milton clearly in mind, he hesitated long among various epic

schemes, and the pages of *The Prelude* which describe this process of alternate joy and disillusion—' mistaking proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea ' (I, 170–235)—show into what unexpected regions his poetic ambition could stray. In Milton's steps he settles on

> some British theme, some old
> Romantic tale by Milton left unsung;

or, more often, ' resting at some gentle place ' pipes among the Shepherds, or listens to the tales of Knights as they repose by a fountain-side. Or he falls back on ancient history which, with Poetry, De Quincey thought to be the only subject he knew, and ponders an epic on the legend of Sertorius recorded by Gibbon; or, again, on tales of more modern heroes, who vindicated liberty, or fell for it, like Gustavus Vasa, or Wallace. But then came a ' last and favourite aspiration ',

> some philosophic Song
> Of Truth that cherishes our daily life,
> With meditations passionate from deep
> Recesses in man's heart.[1]

That this aspiration was especially fascinating to him, and abandoned only with deep reluctance and dejection, is intelligible enough when we recall the eager philosophical studies which had clearly occupied him in the previous months. Deficient as he certainly was in the power of abstract, systematic thought, a philosophical poem was not therefore doomed to failure in his hands. He could never have rivalled Lucretius, not to speak of Dante. But he brought to the task one qualification in

[1] *Prel.*, I, 230 f.

an even higher degree, so far as we know, than they—a mind charged with wonderful and mysterious experiences, baffling to the common understanding of men. His studies in philosophy had not been gratifications of simple curiosity, but a search for an authentic interpretation of his own consciousness. And a philosophic poem in his hands would not have been a system translated into verse, but an account of what he had apprehended in visionary intuition, made explicit by the help of the language of disciplined thought.

It seems certain that this project was both suggested, encouraged, and its particular theme and compass more exactly defined, by Coleridge in the early months of 1798. It was to be called 'The Recluse, or Views on Man, Nature, and Society'. That the contemplation of such a theme could lift him for a moment to the heights of inspired vision is easily intelligible if, with Mr Garrod and Mr de Selincourt, we hold that the magnificent verses known as 'A Fragment from the Recluse', and published as the 'Prospectus' prefixed to *The Excursion*, were at least drafted at this time. Of this great overture, rehearsing the themes of the philosophical poem he planned, and which he partially executed in the early years at Grasmere, something will be said when we reach that time.

At Alfoxden he became engrossed in carrying out this grandiose scheme. But the hint of the matter of the intended poem given in the verses quoted above might serve as a brief summary of the purport of the poem just referred to, the 'Fragment from the Recluse' itself. For the 'haunt and the main region of his "Song"' there announced, were to be just those 'meditations passionate

from deep Recesses in man's heart' which he foreshadowed when he spoke of his awestruck search into 'the Mind of Man'. And the belief that the 'Truth' drawn from those 'deep recesses' would conduce to 'cherish our daily life' seems to reflect the hope there held out that those 'words that speak of nothing more than what we are' might

> arouse the sensual from their sleep
> Of death, and win the vacant and the vain
> To noble raptures.

But whether or not the 'Fragment' was actually drafted at this time it is certain that a poem called 'The Recluse, or Views on Man, Nature and Society', was suggested by Coleridge at Alfoxden, and that in the early months of 1798 Wordsworth was busily and confidently at work upon it. Early in March he had written 1300 lines of such a poem. It was to be, as he wrote to Tobin, so comprehensive that 'I know not anything that will not come within the scope of my plan'. It is probable, as Mr de Selincourt has shown, that these 1300 lines included 'The Ruined Cottage' and 'The Old Cumberland Beggar,' both of them at this time enlarged in compass as well as in scope. But the work was not carried much further on these lines. Such an amalgam might fitly enough be described as 'Pictures' of Nature, Man and Society. But it could not have become a great poem. It could not be regarded as even remotely foreshadowing the great philosophical poem on Man, Nature and Society, which Coleridge had in view, and of which Wordsworth himself had had that prophetic vision.

To that mood of eager and inspired activity there succeeded, in any case, as he tells us (*Prel.*, I, 235 f.), a time of deep dejection and self-distrust. For a moment he had seen only the glorious privilege of soaring to heights

> To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil,

and searching to its depths the mysterious mind of man. Now he shrank back from the 'awful burthen' of such an enterprise. He was haunted by misgivings not only as to his capacity for philosophic poetry but as to his calling and function as a poet. He felt the dejection of one conscious of high powers, but everywhere baffled in the attempt to use them. Was his life then to waste away in voluptuous wandering and vacant musing? Was he to be one

> Unprofitably travelling towards the grave
> Like a false steward who hath much received
> And renders nothing back?

But light came. If he could not as yet hope to fathom the mysteries of the mind of man, he could at least tell the history of one human mind, his own. If he could not give a comprehensive philosophy of Nature, he could describe with intimate truth what Nature had been to him. And this survey of his own spiritual history would both prepare him for the larger enterprise and enable him to judge finally of his fitness for it. 'I began the work', he wrote after completing *The Prelude*, in 1805, to Beaumont, 'because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous theme'.

All these motives doubtless helped to determine the inception of *The Prelude*. Yet he announces it not like one acquiescing in a second-best course, but with the rapture of discovery. Why should a poet who had

received the 'gift' of such an experience as his 'render nothing back'? He needed only to tell it. And so he turns with a superb outburst upon his doubting self:

> Was it for this
> That one, the fairest of all Rivers lov'd
> To blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song,
> And from his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
> That flowed along my dreams? For this didst Thou,
> O Derwent! travelling over the green Plains
> Near my 'sweet Birthplace', didst thou, beauteous Stream,
> Make ceaseless music through the night and day . . .
> (I, 271 f.)

Thus, after the time of experiment, baffled hopes, and painful misgivings, Wordsworth embarked upon the fair water of a theme to which he was entirely equal, the story of the growth of his own mind. It even fell within the compass of the large theme suggested by Coleridge for *The Recluse*. For the 'passionate meditations' of the Recluse upon 'Man, Nature and Society', for which he was as yet unqualified, might properly have as a Proem the history of 'the Recluse' himself. And it seems clear that the 'poem on the history of his own mind', which became *The Prelude*, was at the outset regarded by Wordsworth as an integral part of *The Recluse*, and known by that name.[1]

Yet, in spite of this triumphant start, *The Prelude* (to give it its ultimate name) was not carried very far at Alfoxden. It was a time of vast designs and magnificent inspirations, some of which, like this, were destined to

[1] The above account is in the main based upon Mr. de Selincourt's very valuable discussion (Introd., p. xxv f.). But even after his and Mr. Garrod's acute study, it remains difficult to reconcile the data derived from *The Prelude* and from Wordsworth's correspondence, both of which must nevertheless be true.

correspondingly magnificent execution in after years. One scheme only was completely achieved there, the little volume of joint contributions famous as the *Lyrical Ballads.*

II

If Coleridge gave the impulse to Wordsworth's adventures with the philosophical poem, he also led the way in song. Far more 'philosophical' in intellectual constitution, and far more lyrical in temperament than his friend, his influence here also occasioned much that was dubious, even abortive, in Wordsworth's work. But in both fields the deeper originality of Wordsworth ultimately found its way to poetry of enduring greatness and beauty in kinds wholly his own.

It was in lyric that the two poets had their hours of most intimate common delight. When Wordsworth, in the moving last lines of *The Prelude*, just after his brother's death, recalled to his friend that happy summer, seven years before, when they first

> Together wanton'd in wild Poesy,

the surging memories were not of philosophical poems nor of critical discussions, but of the Ancient Mariner and Christabel, the Idiot Boy and the Thorn, joyously recited as they ranged the grassy heights and sylvan dells of Quantock.

Critical discussions were nevertheless, as is well known, the immediate occasion of the *Lyrical Ballads.* The germ was sown in that meeting when Coleridge discovered in 'Guilt and Sorrow' Wordsworth's 'original gift of spreading the atmosphere of the ideal world over [familiar] forms and incidents, and making them as if they were not

familiar'. The discovery was momentous for both poets. It had for both more than merely literary significance. It expressed both a new poetic attitude to the real world and a new way of apprehending reality. For it suggested that reality, to become poetic, did not require to be adorned, but only to be seen; and that the sublimest dreams of imagination may be equalled by a poetry that speaks of 'nothing more than what we are'.

But the two poets approached this common faith and this common aim from different angles. The distinction between these is a commonplace of criticism. Wordsworth's imagination communicated the charm of marvel to things despised and disregarded as common. But to Coleridge the lure of marvel was paramount; the mystics and neo-platonists had been his companions from boyhood because of the marvellous things they seemed to prove to be real. For Wordsworth there lay an indefinable power of suggestion in the simplest incidents and characters, even in proportion to their simplicity; Coleridge was drawn rather to things that arrest and surprise, to the startling and the strange; to the wonders of chemistry and the lore of ghosts and witches. The simple village folks to whom both poets turned were for Wordsworth examples of elemental humanity, untouched by the baser influences of civilization; for Coleridge they were depositories of a 'folk-lore' not yet disintegrated by intelligence and education.

These divergences rested in part upon differences in the make and build of the two men, which went deeper than their completely unlike training. Hazlitt, who visited them at Nether Stowey early in 1798, admirably noted their different habits of composition. Coleridge 'liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or

breaking through the straggling branches of a copse-wood, where the physical incessantly deflected the current of thought; while Wordsworth always wrote walking up a straight gravel path'. These traits of the workshop illustrate several differences in their work. Coleridge loved broken surfaces, picturesque interruptions—may-thorn and yew, purple islands amid bright sea; Wordsworth painted with a broader touch, treating detail with even prosaic fidelity, but rarely lingering over its bright play. And to Coleridge the 'interruptions' of the spiritual world, the straggling branches of marvel which startle and waylay the observer, were peculiarly fascinating. Wordsworth, on the other hand, finding his marvel in the familiar, could not be persuaded to concern himself even with the folk-lore of Stowey, at their doors.

These divergences betrayed themselves sharply and fatally when they tried the always hazardous experiment of joint composition. Of the three experiments, two have only a pathological interest. 'The Wanderings of Cain' is only memorable for the vivid picture drawn by Coleridge of his friend's 'grand and noble countenance' and the 'look of humorous despondency' depicted on it as he contemplated his almost blank paper. 'The Three Graves', if not a fiasco, illustrates no less the stubborn incompatibility of their powers. And 'The Ancient Mariner' became the superb success it is because Wordsworth's contributions were either, like his few lines of description, too slight to count, or, like the shooting of the albatross, were brilliantly applied to the purpose of a poetry to which it was originally alien.

Such failures to co-operate sprang from no diversity of conviction or of aim, but only from the extreme psychical unlikeness of the two poets. They possessed a

profound common faith, but only incompatible idioms to express it. Beyond doubt it is to Coleridge, the more resourceful and ingenious, as he was the less persistent, of the two, that we must ascribe the device, as both have described it, of a volume composed of two sorts of poems; one upon subjects supernatural but made real by the dramatic truth of such emotions, supposing them real; the other, assigned to Wordsworth, dealing with subjects 'such as will be found in every village and its vicinity'. The poems were to be ballads, telling their stories in the simple, seemingly artless, way which both poets admired in the *Reliques*, and in *Lenore*; but they were to claim rank as poetry, as song, and thus the volume received the title *Lyrical Ballads*.

Wordsworth's part in the common enterprise was carried out with copious industry. But he was handicapped in its execution by his smaller gift both of narrative and of song, and by his far less happy management of the theoretic basis. We must not quarrel with him for having a theoretic basis. A poet, he justly claimed, must have thought profoundly as well as deeply felt. But the thinking which underlay the contents of the *Lyrical Ballads* was sometimes a too intrusive, sometimes a treacherous, guide. The incidents and passions were to be those of village life, where passion was most purely felt and most sincerely expressed; and the poems were therefore to be couched in the language thus 'sincerely' used. Of the theory thus hinted more must be said in dealing with the famous 'Preface' independently composed two years later.

In the meantime, it suffices to glance summarily at the phenomenon presented by Wordsworth's portion of the *Lyrical Ballads*—genius struggling in the toils of a plan

in part resting on insight, in part on illusion; now reaching a half-success within its conditions, now frustrated and misled by them; sometimes while complying with them, winning original beauty; but only completely and superbly itself when the plan is either ignored or is not in question.

So singular a medley, touching, sometimes on adjoining pages, the grotesque and the exquisite, the bathetic and the sublime, was likely to divide or bewilder criticism when it came to be seriously judged at all. No piece excited more derision in its day, none is more securely remembered in ours, than 'We are Seven'. Its merit was debated even before it was in print. A friend, as is well known, implored Wordsworth to withdraw it. 'Nay', he replied. 'That shall take its chance, however'. Whatever bearing the piece had upon 'the passions of our nature', it had for Wordsworth a deeper appeal than this; more even than the incapacity of a healthy child, who 'feels its life in every limb', to imagine death. That opening stanza, supplied impromptu by Coleridge, was later adopted by Wordsworth, and even imagined to be his own. But the little maid's artless answers were then for him, as Dr. Bradley has insisted, tokens of the naïve 'sense of immortality' inseparable from Wordsworthian childhood. But sometimes the village incidents have neither this evident charm nor this latent profundity; merely the prosaic virtue of moral lessons. Even the final stanza of 'Simon Lee' cannot save it, any more than the 'Anecdote for Fathers', from triviality. Nor does he always escape this even where, as in 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', his 'incident' calls forth just pity and indignation, and is carried to a climax dressed up in the semblance of a tragic Nemesis. Here Wordsworth was nearing the verge which divides his proper

domain from superstition. And we may perhaps ascribe to the magnetism of Coleridge other invocations of folk-lore which at moments touch with alien horror and awe the native atmosphere of the village incident. It is thus that in 'The Thorn', the most elaborate of Wordsworth's pieces, the thought that the unborn infant wrought upon its mother's heart is truly Wordsworthian; but the Thorn and the little grave gather at the close a spectral horror in the light of popular belief.

> Some say, if to the pond you go
> And fix on it a steady view,
> The shadow of a babe you trace,
> A baby and a baby's face,
> And that it looks at you.

Once more the motive of madness, and once more the derangement of a bereaved mother (as in 'The Thorn' and in 'Margaret') drew him, in 'The Mad Mother', later called, from its opening words, 'Her Eyes are Wild'. This is the finest of the tragic 'ballads'; the story, as in some of the best of the old ballads, being told by the person most deeply concerned—here the mother herself—who, with the piteous incoherences of her madness and her grief, somehow evades the lapses to which Wordsworth's narrative style is commonly liable. It is natural to ask whether some personal ground may not have occasioned this iterated recourse to the theme of the deserted mother. Wordsworth's abandonment of Annette had not been voluntary, and they appear to have exchanged letters during the early years at least of the war. But we know from Dorothy's correspondence with Mrs Marshall that a letter from her had arrived showing that a number of their letters had not reached their destination. Could

he then write, without thinking of Annette and their child, such lines as

> Thy father cares not for my breast,
> 'Tis thine, sweet baby, there to rest;

or

> Dread not their taunts, my little life;
> I am thy father's wedded wife . . .
> And every day we two will pray
> For him that's gone and far away.

And we may well ask (as has been often suggested) whether the most poignant of all Wordsworth's narrative poems, 'The Ruined Cottage', does not owe some of its power to the anguished image of Annette with her little babe looking vainly along the road for the figure of the husband who does not return.

There was more originality, and a sharper challenge to current taste, in 'The Idiot Boy', composed, Wordworth tells us, with huge glee, and almost extempore, as he sat in the groves of Alfoxden. It was not the subject that was wrong, as the derisive public thought; but the tactless levity of style which made it excusable to mistake Wordsworth's purpose. He seemed to be relating with 'huge' and unseemly gusto an idiot's adventure, when his motive was to illustrate the depth of a mother's love thus lavished upon an object so repellent to others.

Of greater interest as a challenge is the yet more notorious 'Peter Bell', withheld from publication till 1819. For Wordsworth's naturalism here becomes aggressive. He claims, in effect, that that division of poetic territory between himself and Coleridge, on which the *Lyrical Ballads* were based, ignored the capacity of 'Nature', even 'in the humblest departments of daily life', to produce just those wild and witching effects upon

the imagination for which Coleridge had called in the 'supernatural'. So he devises out of his recollections of talk with an old pedlar a tale of weird but perfectly explicable happenings. Peter Bell is a brutal, insensible man, for whom a primrose by the river's brim was just a primrose, and to whom imaginative visitations were thus out of the question. But a dead man's face seen through the water by moonlight and the braying of an ass fill his heart with terror. The Prologue is a not ungraceful assertion of the poet's power, if he would, to deal in that unearthly poetry, together with a final farewell to it. He too has his faery boat, like the crescent moon, which can bear him through all the spheres; but he knows that his true province is the Earth, and with this he is content:

> Long have I loved what I behold,
> The night that calms, the day that cheers,
> The common growth of mother-earth
> Suffices me, her tears, her mirth,
> Her humblest mirth and tears.

Wordsworth was justified in his assertion, but unjust towards Coleridge in what he denied. Both poets enriched poetry by enlarging, in the main at different points, its hold upon reality. Both, as M. Aynard has said, are thus ultimately realists. And their common domain is marked by the moonlight which served equally to carry the fancy to worlds beyond the earth and to spread enchantment over a familiar and ordinary scene.

III

But it was in the group of meditative or philosophical poems, included in the volume, not in the *Lyrical Ballads*

proper, that Wordsworth's most distinctive contributions were to be found. In the 'Lines Written in Early Spring', 'Expostulation' and 'Reply', and 'The Tables Turned', nothing but one or two titles and stanzas is banal. They are all classical in a kind to which nothing in our literature, and little in any other, is analogous. The simplicity of style which Wordsworth sought is here captured without effort, and the pitfalls which imitation of 'the language actually spoken by men' as he presently, in the preface to the second edition, unhappily called it, beset him when he was trying to tell a 'simple' story, seem not to exist where he is uttering, in his own person, the profundities of the faith he has now securely won. He is speaking primarily to Dorothy, and it is the faith to which she, not in articulate words but by the contagion of her radiant presence, had insensibly led him. The tragic disasters of the human lot which had so largely occupied him, which occupied him still in most of the *Lyrical Ballads*, now fall into the background before the universal joyousness of Nature.

> To her fair works did Nature link
> The human soul that through me ran,
> And much it grieved my heart to think
> What man has made of man.
>
> Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
> The periwinkle trailed its wreaths,
> And 'tis my faith that every flower
> Enjoys the air it breathes.

And not only enjoys, but speaks, for the open eye and ear. For Nature is alive and, evading capture by the analytic processes of thought, impresses herself spontaneously on minds laid open to her 'in a wise passiveness'. Hence,

with a complete revulsion from his old Godwinian faith, he turns upon the advocate of reason and science with that challenging retort:

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.
>
> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Misshapes the beauteous forms of things,
> We murder to dissect.
>
> Enough of Science and of Art;
> Close up those barren leaves,
> Come forth, and bring with you a heart
> That watches and receives.

Not all of this is equally serious; the round dismissal of books is playful banter of his old Schoolmaster by an exceedingly well-read, though not erudite, poet. And the attack on science is directed against the mechanical operations and conclusions of science by a poet who revered so profoundly the ideal of knowledge that he defined Poetry itself as 'the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science'.[1] No doubt this great saying is itself revolutionary; Wordsworth did not mean that Poetry is instruction expressed with emotion, or argument conveyed, as by Dryden, with eloquence and *élan*. He meant that the Imagination, which is the creative faculty of Poetry, is also a supreme form of Reason, 'Reason in her most exalted mood'; not the 'mistress of error', the 'mad inmate of the mind', contemptuously dismissed by the great seventeenth-century masters of

[1] Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 2nd edition (1800).

inspired reason, but an instrument of discovery and a warrant of certitude.

And that 'wise passiveness', too, which made the poem 'Expostulation and Reply', as Wordsworth tells us, in his own day 'a favourite among the Quakers', needs interpretation. The closing phrase of 'The Tables Turned' warns us that the 'passiveness' must be eager and alert, the 'wise' passiveness of 'a heart that watches as well as receives'. And in Wordsworth's developed thought this eager 'watching' is only the condition on which inner creative power is put forth. 'They', he says of such watchers in a famous passage (*Prel.* XIII, 93 f.):

> They from their native selves can send abroad
> Like transformations, for themselves create
> A like existence, and whene'er it is
> Created for them, catch it by an instinct;
> Them the enduring and the transient both
> Serve to exalt; they build up greatest things
> From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
> Willing to work, and to be wrought upon,
> They need not extraordinary calls
> To rouze them, in a world of life they live,
> By sensible impressions not enthrall'd,
> But quicken'd, rouz'd, and made thereby more apt
> To hold communion with the invisible world.

The volume closes and culminates with the 'Lines written above Tintern Abbey'. Ignored by almost all the original reviewers, it has perhaps passed more completely into the general mind of England than any other of Wordsworth's poems. But familiar as it is, it cannot be dismissed with a brief tribute here. For it is not only a great poem, of a flawless and noble beauty throughout such as Wordsworth rarely achieves; it is

also one of his most personal pieces, wrought from the inmost stuff of his mind and heart.

In one respect the 'Lines' stand almost alone among his poems. Composed on coach and boat as he and Dorothy returned from the Wye (on 13th July, 1798), and immediately after written down, they owe nothing to that after-meditation which, in his own view, was commonly needed to make explicit in his poetry its potential strength. Composed almost at the close of the Alfoxden time, 'Tintern Abbey' sums up all that Alfoxden had meant for him, all that Nature, Man, and his own history meant for him in the light of his own ripe thinking and impassioned observation, quickened by the constant companionship of Coleridge and Dorothy. It is now for the first time that we find that comparison of the mood in which he writes with one definitely gone by which is to form the groundwork, a few years later, of the 'Immortality Ode'; but he does not yet, as there, regard that past state as a glory that is gone and that he would fain recover. On the contrary, the man of twenty-eight does not doubt that he stands definitely above the man of twenty-three, that his meditative outlook is worth more than his utter absorption five years before, in the joys of eye and ear:

> That time is past,
> And all its aching joys are now no more
> And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
> Faint I, nor mourn, nor murmur; other gifts
> Have followed; for such loss I would believe
> Abundant recompence.

Then he describes in classical verses how 'Nature' has now become for him an organ of perception for things beyond herself, how he has heard in her

> The still, sad music of humanity,

and felt in her life

> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused . . .

And while years have brought him these enlarged capacities of perception, those old memories themselves have, like the memories of his childhood, exercised over him their power to restore; a power which acted often by unconscious influence, 'sensations sweet felt in the blood, and felt along the heart', but also gave rise to moments in which he seemed to attain the mystic's liberation from the thraldom of the body and the intellect, the mystic's insight into the inmost 'life of things', and the mystic's assurance that reality is good.

And it is the blessings of memory which, in the closing lines, he invokes for the beloved companion of that wonderful day. But those mystic heights, he knows, are not, or not yet, for her. If she had gone before him in the lore of delicate senses, she here follows him at a distance. The 'wild ecstasies' which he has outgrown still possess her. Presently they will mature; yet not, as with him, into that transcendent mood in which 'we are laid asleep in body and become a living soul', but into the 'sober pleasure' of calm reminiscence, when her mind 'shall be as a dwelling-place for all lovely forms'.

IV

Wordsworth's activities during the thirteen months at Alfoxden reached their fitting consummation in the Tintern poem. His poetic life during these months, vast in its ideal scope and compass, moved yet within a narrowly-defined horizon. Events of stupendous moment

for England and for Europe were happening across the Channel, and Nether Stowey itself was by no means the recluse's hermitage which the record of Wordsworth's poetic activities might suggest. Coleridge, probably the most magnetic personality of his generation, an inexhaustibly brilliant talker, and well known as a journalist of pronouncedly radical opinions, was sought out in his far-off retreat by friends of varied calibre as well as by government emissaries. Charles Lamb, fresh from his domestic calamity, walked from London, and gave occasion to Coleridge's verses 'The Lime Tree Bower'; the Jacobin Thelwall, newly acquitted of high treason, but still shadowed by the agents of a government foiled of its prey, came to forget politics in the dells of Alfoxden; the honest tanner Poole, whose comfortable homestead was hard by Nether Stowey, offered devoted homage to Coleridge and hospitality to all his friends. There, too, came, as we have seen, young William Hazlitt, discovered by Coleridge on a preaching tour in Shropshire, and invited to Stowey, which he saw and described with the rapt but critical ardour of genius at twenty.

The conversation of these and other friends at Nether Stowey with Coleridge certainly did not turn chiefly upon the processes by which common incidents may be idealized in poetry, or upon the nature and activity of imagination. Eager political discussion did not flag because London was far away. Coleridge had indicted vehement rhetorical odes, as well as political sonnets, in the Liberal London press. At the close of 1796 he had deplored the impending ruin of England in his 'Ode to the Departing Year'. In the following winter (1797–8) came the invasion of Switzerland, instantly shattering the claim of France to be the liberator of

enslaved nations. Her English friends were scattered, and Coleridge, once the most vehement among them, now, in February, 1798, recanted in his 'France: an Ode.' But England herself was now in danger; for since the Peace of Campo-Formio between France and her other enemies, England stood alone in the field against her. Coleridge once more raised his voice, but now, like Wordsworth five years later, he feels that England, by her own guilty corruption, deserves the peril she has incurred.

In all this Wordsworth took no part whatever. He not merely wrote nothing on the great issues pending, he refused, as Coleridge expressly tells us, to talk about them. 'His conversation extended to almost all subjects, except physics and politics; with the latter he never troubled himself'. Yet he beyond all the rest, certainly beyond Coleridge himself, knew and loved France. A little later, too, he was to come forward with a series of political utterances both in verse and prose, loftier, weightier, more searching, and more heroic, more instinct with the prophet's fire and with the prophet's scorn than anything that had been written in English since Milton. Why was he now silent? Not, certainly, because he 'never troubled himself' about these things, as Coleridge rather perfunctorily puts it. We can only surmise. Wordsworth's mind, massive and, as he says, somewhat slow, moved sometimes 'altogether if it moved at all'. Once before he had been silent because the hour of Man had not yet struck. Now the hour of Nationhood had not yet come, and he was again silent.

Coleridge, on his part, had talked endlessly, and composed the stirring and eloquent Odes already mentioned. But his part in the scheme of the *Lyrical Ballads* remained, save for 'The Ancient Mariner,' and was always to

remain, apart from a few half-hearted attempts like 'The Three Graves', unfulfilled. A magnificent exception indeed, far outweighing in value the whole of Wordsworth's contributions to the scheme in this volume; and it is one of the gravest charges against Wordsworth's critical capacity that he was so far from recognizing it. In September the little volume was published at Bristol by the enthusiastic young publisher Joseph Cottle. Shortly before it appeared the Alfoxden household had broken up, and Wordsworth and Dorothy, with Coleridge, had embarked for Germany. On 16th September, having left London by coach two days before, they took ship from Yarmouth for Hamburg.

# CHAPTER VII

## THE GOLDEN YEARS

### I

The immediate occasion of the move was the abrupt termination, by the owner, of Wordsworth's tenancy of the Alfoxden mansion. The project of a winter in Germany undoubtedly originated with Coleridge. He was drawn not only by a flair for philosophic speculation and for impassioned poetry, but by a strong if vaguely felt sense of intellectual affinity. His was without doubt the most German, in its instinctive postulates and modes of thinking, of all English minds of his generation. He knew something of the significance of Kant, and he had been enthralled by *The Robbers* of Schiller. His immediate aim, like Wordsworth's in going to France seven years before, was to learn the language; but this was only as a first step to larger cultural acquisitions; and we know that, in fact, his 'acquisitions' in the fertile fields of German speculation and criticism were destined to transform the native and traditional elements of his thought, with significant consequences for the intellectual and religious life of England in the next generation.

Wordsworth felt no such lure. He had indeed expressed in a letter to a friend (James Losh) in the previous March, his desire to go to Germany to study natural history. But his execution of this desire during his residence

there seems to have been confined to watching a kingfisher from the ramparts at Goslar. Nor did Wordsworth, then or later, show the faintest interest in German poetry, or (apart from one or two unimportant loans) in any German poet. On the contrary, he continued to associate with Germany precisely those mischievous extravagances which most conflicted with his own ideal of truth to life. German literature meant to him 'frantic novels, sickly and stupid tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse'. The minutest scrutiny of his entire work has discovered nothing but a few allusions, usually contemptuous or colourless. Here was one of the most palpable defects in Wordsworth's critical and poetic sensibility. It is not that he was, as has often been said, incapable of appreciating any other poetry than his own. That is entirely untrue if it means that he did not keenly enjoy poetry over a wide range; it ignores his noble rendering of Michelangelo, and the familiar allusions to the great poets peculiarly dear at Grasmere, including the 'moon-like pacing' of Spenser's verse, so unlike his own.

German poetry, in 1798, had still to reach full maturity. But had he troubled to learn the language, he would have found that Goethe and Schiller had for years been producing 'lyrical ballads' of more sustained beauty and far more accomplished technique than any which he had yet written; where the problems which had divided him and Coleridge were differently, but on the whole more adequately, solved. The poet of 'Erlkönig' had nothing to learn from the poet of 'Christabel'; and if neither Goethe nor Schiller had faced as boldly as Wordsworth the task of climbing to poetry by the ladder of the commonplace, Goethe had found, and exercised

with assured mastery, the secret of the naïve simplicity of speech in lyric which Wordsworth groped after, constantly missed with grotesque effect, and only now and then perfectly achieved.

It was, however, singularly enough, in Goethe's country, not a hundred miles from Weimar, but in complete and contemptuous disdain for the author of *Werther* (probably at this time the limit of his knowledge), that precisely these few perfect lyrics were composed. The study of 'natural history', if ever seriously intended, came to nothing, and that of German language and literature to little more. At Hamburg he and Coleridge visited Klopstock; they also mingled, thanks to Wordsworth's accomplished French, with the large colony of French *émigrés* (some 40,000 in number), who had found refuge there).[1] Among these was the Abbé Delisle, an eminent representative, in French poetry, of precisely those fashions of artificial diction which he and Coleridge had attempted to discourage by showing the better way of their *Lyrical Ballads*, and against which the polemical blast of Wordsworth's 'Preface' was shortly to be directed. His talk with Delisle was not, then, likely to be fruitful to either; nor was much to be hoped from his talk in French with the ageing Klopstock ('the German Milton'), who stood for a bygone epoch of the young German literature, now growing daily in range and depth. A portrait of Lessing, the greatest man of letters of the previous generation, hung in Klopstock's room, and Coleridge already projected a Life of him, not the least regrettable of the schemes he left unfulfilled. But after a few days the friends

[1] For a detailed account of the Hamburg Émigrés, see M. Baldensperger's valuable *Le Mouvement des Idées entre les Émigrés de la Révolution Française*, 1926.

separated; Coleridge to plunge into serious study of German language, literature and philosophy at Ratzeburg, while Wordsworth and Dorothy settled at Goslar to spend a winter which, if it opened no new horizons, brought him a clearer vision and securer mastery of much that lay nearest home. For in that alien environment 'Home Thoughts from Abroad' came to him with an intensity he had never known; and the absence of distractions and appeals permitted him the better to remember with tranquillity. Certain memories rose in his mind with bell-like clarity and loveliness. The matchless picture of his boyhood in the opening Books of *The Prelude*, planned as we know at Alfoxden, was probably the work of these months at Goslar. To these, too, we owe the even rarer beauty of the 'Lucy' poems. Nothing in these poems in any way recalls what we know of Wordsworth's actual experiences of love. This idyll of a lonely mountain glen throws no light upon the sudden passion which had inflamed him in the midst of the revolutionary turbulence of Orleans. Annette, whatever else she was, was certainly no child of Nature, and the Lucy, here rather delicately hinted than drawn, is enshrined, like the more vivid and personal image of Dorothy, in his ideal of Nature and the moulding discipline she brings. That image can hardly have been absent in any case from the 'Three years she grew', where the girl is expressly described as a Child taken to herself by Nature, and made 'a Lady of my own'; nowhere has he more simply and delicately described that twofold power of Nature, to quicken and to calm, extolled in the opening of the Twelfth Book of *The Prelude*:

> Myself will to my darling be
> Both law and impulse: and with me

> The Girl, in rock and plain,
> In earth and heaven, in glade and bower
> Shall feel an overseeing power
> To kindle or restrain.

In the Tintern lines to Dorothy he had prefigured his own earlier death. Here it is the maid who dies; and in another of these little lyrics he is content to forgo all thought of that healing and uplifting power of memory, so movingly dwelt on there, for a simple exclamation, almost banal in its abstract bareness:

> But she is in her grave, and, oh,
> The difference to me!

But this was not all. The eight-line epitaph, 'A slumber did my spirit seal', is almost as bare, but its bareness is stoical, impersonal, sublime; its austere reticence more eloquent of passion than outspoken grief. It was this bareness that Matthew Arnold (elsewhere less well inspired when he spoke of Wordsworth) meant by his writing, at times, with the 'bare sheer penetrating power' of Nature herself. Coleridge saw its quality at once, and also thought of an imaginary application to Dorothy. 'Some months ago', he wrote to Poole on April 6th, 1799, 'Wordsworth transmitted to me a most sublime epitaph. Whether it had any reality I cannot say. Most probably in some gloomier moment he had fancied the moment 'in which his sister should die'. Such a thought was the more natural for Coleridge since several letters addressed to them at Goslar attest how deeply he felt his isolation after the joyous intimacy of Nether Stowey and Alfoxden, and how far his daily growing citizenship of that intellectual and philosophic world of Germany, from which they were so completely estranged, and which Words-

worth at least stubbornly refused to enter, was from replacing for him their unique companionship among the Quantock glades. Dorothy is now his sister too; and he addresses them, characteristically, not in verse flawlessly true to a simple English measure, like Wordsworth in these lyrics, but in a faulty imitation of those hexameters which 'daring Germany' had already begun to send us, but which neither Voss nor Schiller, nor even Goethe, had handled with technical mastery more than occasionally complete.

William, my teacher and friend! William, and dear Dorothea!
William, my 'head' and my 'heart,' dear Poet that feelest and thinkest;
Dorothy, eager of soul, my most affectionate sister!

. . . . .

You have all in each other: but I am lonely and want you!

In Wordsworth, on the contrary, as we have seen, the foreign environment only heightened the English qualities of his work. Nor was 'Lucy' the only memory that rose with this exquisite delicacy and clarity into his brooding mind. In 'Expostulation and Reply' and 'The Tables Turned', the old schoolmaster had been little more than an occasion for the lore of Nature with which the poet confronted the prejudices of the School. In 'The Two April Mornings' and 'The Fountain', the situation is resumed, but the contrast of the boy and the schoolmaster is now lovingly and tenderly touched, and the thoughts on youth and age, less provocative and incisive than the former vindications of the vernal woods and the linnet's song, touch commonplace even more happily with magic:

The wiser mind
Mourns less for what age takes away
Than what it leaves behind.

The story of Ruth, heard at Alfoxden, made severer demands upon Wordsworth's art, and is of more unequal quality. But it showed that he could paint with power the exotic splendour of the Indian forest, and also the poignant pathos of the girl for whom Nature has been not only the influence that moulded her beauty, but 'the engine of her pain, the tool that shaped her sorrow'. 'Lucy Gray', too, suffers a pathetic doom; but her 'solitude' evoking, as always, the mystic in Wordsworth, touches her with a more unearthly beauty. In 'The Poet's Epitaph' Wordsworth draws a memorable picture of the Poet—'retired as mountain dew' . . . 'and you must love him ere to you He will seem worthy of your love'—even truer in the complete seclusion of Goslar than in the rich companionship of Alfoxden. It scarcely suggested the poet who was, here at Goslar, working upon a poem which, though called *The Recluse*, comprehended Man, Nature, and Society in its range. Still less did it suggest, nor did Wordsworth himself foresee, that this Recluse was, within a couple of years, to lift to his lips the trumpet of Milton, animating and reproving his fellow-countrymen.

II

The brief winter in Germany, however felicitous its poetic harvest, had thus proved merely an episode the close of which left him, to all appearance, precisely what he had been when it began. The life of whole-hearted devotion to poetry which had opened at Racedown and Alfoxden allured him as keenly as ever, and after a few months of search what proved to be the final haven was found. The Dorsetshire home had been determined by the generosity of a Bristol friend, that in Somerset by the

neighbourhood of Coleridge. But the north-country Lakeland had been known and beloved by both brother and sister in their childhood and a reminiscence of William's schoolday rambles drew them to Grasmere. Into that exquisite valley he had once looked down, doubtless from Red Bank:

> Once to the verge of yon steep barrier came
> A roving schoolboy . . .
> And with a sudden influx overpowered
> At sight of this seclusion, he forgot
> His haste . . . and sighing said,
> 'What happy fortune were it here to live!'

This then became henceforth one of those 'spots of memory' which counted for so much in Wordsworth's happiness, as in his poetry; a 'haunt of pure affections, shedding upon joy a brighter joy'; and here, now that he was free to choose, he made a home for himself and Dorothy. Coleridge's neighbourhood was, since Alfoxden, needful to them both. But theirs was even more needful to him; and now it was he who followed them into a land to him hitherto entirely strange, becoming their constant guest, almost the fellow-inmate of their 'happy Castle'. In Grasmere Wordsworth recognized a spot uniquely fitted for such work as his. Alfoxden, with its woods and glades and rocky dells, had been the constant occasion of beautiful or profound thoughts; but it had never become for him that little ideal world in itself, whose many-sided appeal he described in magical words:

> 'Tis, but I cannot name it, 'tis the sense
> Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,
> A blended holiness of earth and sky,
> Something that makes this individual spot,
> This small abiding-place of many men,
> A termination, and a last retreat,

> A centre, come from wheresoe'r you will,
> A whole without dependence or defect,
> Made for itself, and happy in itself,
> Perfect contentment, Unity entire.

But he repels peremptorily the associations of Arcadia. Those lines are immediately followed, significantly enough, by the account of the bleak and turbulent December season, through which the brother and sister, side by side, had made their way hither from East Yorkshire, mainly on foot. We have never far to go in this poet of peace to find him, rejoicing, like his Happy Warrior, in storm and turbulence; and from the sternness of the face of Nature their souls drew a feeling of their strength. And he lets us know betimes that this seeming idyll, this retreat of a Recluse at thirty from the active pursuits of life, was no mere indulgence of a desire for tranquil peace, but an obedience to that higher call of Nature which drew him away from the primitive appetites and wrestlings of his youth, and bade him, aided by her twofold gift (*Prel.*, XII, 1) of 'emotion' and repose, to seek

> For other agitations or be calm.

Nor was it a self-centred solitude. There were friends all around, the cottagers, the 'statesmen' whose sterling qualities Wordsworth so greatly valued, the shepherds and their sheepdogs; and then, hardly less, the birch woods, the throng of woodland flowers and birds. His was, within these limits, to be a social life and a social poetry. Yet at the heart of this society lay a deep solitude, the solitude of one who knew himself unique:

> Possessions have I that are solely mine,
> Something within which yet is shared by none,

Not even the nearest to me and most dear,
Something which power and effort may impart,
I would impart it, I would speak it wide.

The immediate scene, the dale and the mountains where the brother and sister roamed together, was full of incitement and suggestion for eyes and hearts so open and so eager as theirs. 'Village incidents' such as Wordsworth had sought to invest with imaginative quality in the *Lyrical Ballads*, were at their doors, and new Lyrical Ballads were thrown off, few equal, however, to the finer among the pieces produced in Germany. And all were surpassed in immediate, all but two or three in lasting, importance by the famous Preface to the new edition, composed in September, 1800. Though the volume still bore the names of both poets, the Preface was the work of Wordsworth alone, and in its failure to disentangle the salutary and profound from the crude and misleading elements of his thoughts, betrayed the absence of Coleridge's subtler analytic power. It was reserved for Coleridge himself, in the *Biographia Literaria*, to provide a masterly corrective. Later criticism has little more to do than build upon his foundation.

Wordsworth made the initial mistake of starting out on his consideration of poetry from what was in effect a narrow and limited province, even of his own; itself confessedly a narrow and limited province in the poetry of the world. 'The principal object proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate them, throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of the Language really used by men.' Both his upbringing among the Cumberland peasantry, and the deep-rooted democratic faith of his early manhood had a larger share in inspiring these designs than his

insight into poetry. He knew that the 'men in humble and rustic life' among whom he had grown up had simple affections which they expressed in speech far removed from the insincerities and affectations of fashion, as from the elegance which he too readily assumed to be itself affected and insincere;—the very word 'elegant,' as Hazlitt remarks, completely disappearing, wherever the Wordsworthian influence penetrated. He was rightly aware that, in the *Lyrical Ballads*, he and Coleridge were leading a 'return to Nature' in poetry; but in this conception of 'Nature' in poetry, fallacies engendered by democratic prejudice were 'inveterately convolved' with profound truth. He thought men were nearer to Nature when they lived among the mountains, when they were peasants, children, or even senile or half-witted; he thought they were nearer to Nature when they talked than when they wrote, and when they wrote prose than when they wrote verse; and he struggled with obvious embarrassment to explain why, that being so, he himself wrote verse at all.

In all this Wordsworth's thought about poetic speech ran in the sharpest antagonism to that of his greatest predecessor among the great poets who have theorized upon the poetic art. Dante's recipe for a poetic speech was a speech denuded of all that was rustic, provincial, or mean; and chosen precisely from the language of the élite, of the courts of the aristocracy, and the courts of law. And Wordsworth's teaching has been contemptuously contrasted with Dante's. Yet if we strip away the extravagances into which Wordsworth was betrayed by the atmosphere in which he had grown up, and if we remember that Dante, in the Comedy, had in every sense, as Vossler says, 'left Virgil behind', and that he was

willing to compose his supreme poem in a diction that any 'muliercula' could understand, we shall find the core of truth and conviction in the minds of these two great poets very closely allied. Dante explained the secret of his own poetry to the second-rate versifiers who questioned him in *Purgatory* by declaring that he wrote 'what love dictated in his heart', in other words, what passion prompted him to say, not what ingenuity contrives.[1] And Wordsworth meant to assert that poetry must be the sincere expression of passion, and not a decorative composition. But Wordsworth overlooked that, as Coleridge pointed out, and as Longinus had perfectly understood long before, the sincere expression of passion does not mean an expression necessarily bare and simple; that, on the contrary, the excitement of emotion may clothe itself instinctively in figure, in splendid irrationalities of phrase, in audacities of structure utterly remote from the regular movement of reasoned speech, and the every-day talk of men—even men of Cumberland. Coleridge had no difficulty in showing that many of Wordsworth's own finest strokes of imagination thus violated the laws of prose usage and the language actually, under any circumstances, 'spoken by men'.

Is Wordsworth's Preface then (including its later qualified versions) a mere presentment of familiar (if forgotten) truth half obscured by paradox and misunderstanding? By no means. Wordsworth did not see that figure and personification may be of the very language of passion and as 'natural' as the naïvest babbling of infancy. But he saw more clearly, and showed perhaps more convincingly, than any previous poet, that the very language of passion may also be bare and austere, may also be

[1] *Purg.*, XXIV, 99 f.

completely in keeping with the syntax and structure of ordinary speech. This is already implied in his conception of Imagination, as 'Reason in her most exalted mood'. Imagination's office, in Wordsworth's view, is precisely to seize things in their profoundest reality, not to distort them; and it may effect this by simply laying them bare in their essential truth, as the moonlight, in his great experience on Snowdon, laid bare the mountain scene curtained by night and cloud. Much of Wordsworth's noblest verse is of this character. It breaks not seldom into imagery, or daring but felicitous infractions of usage, as in

> A sound of homeless joy was in the sky.

But its imaginative quality, though always admitting of these things, does not depend on them. Many of the loftiest passages of *The Prelude* are nobly bare in style. 'Tintern Abbey' itself conveys its meaning in verse of magical power, indeed, but rarely differing in phrase from impassioned prose, and wholly untouched by ornament. And in the little group of 'Lucy' poems he reached at last, as we have seen, more completely than in any of the earlier *Lyrical Ballads*, that ideal of a style conveying the imaginative passion of lyric poetry in language of the barest simplicity. Most consummately in the elegy which Coleridge justly called sublime. Poetry such as this does not justify the paradoxes of the Preface. But they are the extravagances of one who sees intensely a vital truth generally ignored, of which he himself ignores the limited and conditioned validity. Wordsworth's theory of poetry was narrowed by the philosophical principles which as a poet he continually transcended and belied. His acute and delicate senses, supported by

a doctrine which derived all the higher powers from sensation, made belief in his senses a fundamental faith. But it was the faith of a mystic who saw that real world of the senses 'interfused' with something equally real of which imagination was intensely aware, and to which the sense world was not an obstacle but a clue. Hence the 'bare sheer penetrating' style, rejecting all the phraseological apparatus which poetry was supposed to postulate, became in his hands at certain great moments completely adequate because charged with a quality of thought and passion, as in moments of Shakespeare, like Lear's recognition of Cordelia, any but the barest words would obstruct and overlay. Wordsworth vindicated the significance for poetry of such moments. But he built on them a complete theory of poetry, and he was often betrayed by his own theory into the belief that his mystic imagination was lifting into poetry common things,—which remained common after as before.

III

The Preface attracted interest rather by its polemical paradoxes than by its core of ambiguously stated truth. But Wordsworth had, in these same first months at Dove Cottage, if not before, composed a 'Preface' of a very different order, that lyric 'overture' to the great philosophical poem on 'Man, Nature and Society', projected and partly written at Alfoxden, which has been mentioned summarily in the last chapter. It is well, at the threshold of Wordsworth's fifty years at Grasmere, to put beside the incisive pamphlet of the doctrinaire this lofty Prologue of a great poet to his intended work; beside that treatise on poetic speech this sublime forecast of a Poem whose

range was to be the universe of Being, its centre the mind of man. It is the more needful to recall this noble Proem, because its promise was, on the whole, so imperfectly fulfilled. His prophecy had the frequent fate of prophecies; but nowhere else has any English poet since Milton spoken so authentically with the accent of a great prophet. He is following clearly in Milton's steps, a conscious and confessed disciple. But yet a disciple aware that if his powers are less, his vision is larger and his aims more sublime than his master's. The 'Muse' he invokes must be yet greater than Urania; he must soar to regions to which Milton's heaven is a veil, and pass his Jehovah and shouting angels unalarmed; he must descend to regions more terrible than his or any other hell.

Milton knew well that the mind 'is its own place', can make its own hell and heaven. But Wordsworth, heir to two subsequent generations of psychological analysis and interpreting a profounder self-consciousness with the help of Hartley and Coleridge, has a more grounded apprehension of this than was possible to Milton. The mind is for him the mysterious and marvellous workshop in which the raw elements of experience are transmuted into the glories of passion and thought; which even 'half-creates' those elements themselves. And he contemplates that mysterious workshop with fear and awe, but also with joyous exultation, when he regards the Elysian glories which spring from it in creative union with the natural Beauty of earth:

> For the discerning intellect of Man,
> When wedded to this goodly universe
> In love and holy passion, shall find these
> A simple produce of the common day.

Of this 'wedding' he will chant the spousal verse; verse that, speaking of 'nothing more than what we are', may

> arouse the sensual from their sleep
> Of death, and win the vacant and the vain
> To noble raptures,

by drawing the veil of custom from reality, and making Mind and Nature, seen as they are and in the clarity of common day, a source of the admiration and love by which we live.

But this, the 'high argument' of the Poem, will not be its only theme. He will sometimes forgo these grateful haunts, and listen to the lonely cry of anguish, or

> hang
> Brooding above the fierce confederate storm
> Of sorrow barricadoed evermore
> Within the walls of cities.

There, too, he hopes, his poetry may exercise a benign and healing power. Finally, he will not disdain to speak of his own life;

> who and what he was,
> The transitory Being that beheld
> This Vision,

if haply, by divine grace, it may 'express the image of a better time, more wise desires and simpler manners'.

The hope was not vain. But it was not fulfilled by the precise instrumentality which Wordsworth here foreshadowed. The portion of the theme mentioned, as a kind of explanatory appendix, at the close, was alone carried out with the full power of his genius; and even this paused during the early Grasmere years.

Meantime, if the 'cathedral', to use his own later

image, remained a grandiose plan, he built 'chapels' for it industrially enough, but with much uncertainty of style. He was sometimes seduced by his facility to versify 'village incidents' which, as in 'Andrew Jones' or 'Rural Architecture', and even 'The Idle Shepherd Boys', remain merely rhymed anecdotes, sometimes conveyed in those rollicking anapaests of which Wordsworth, even when his mastery of verse-technique was otherwise consummate, never learnt the secret.

Or he writes 'occasional' pieces, suggested by the scenery, as in the group of 'Poems on the Naming of Places', or 'Pastorals' like 'The Pet Lamb' which, adopted at once in the elementary schools, spread the legend of the 'simple Wordsworth' with a degree of excuse entirely wanting in the case of 'We are Seven' or 'The Idiot Boy'.

Or again, he shows a new sensibility to the lure of literary and historic romance. In 'Ellen Irwine' he borrows the stanza of Bürger's 'Lenore' for a ballad built on a Scottish tradition. In the fine *tour de force* 'Hartleap Well', which Georg Brandes, completely deaf to Wordsworth's most individual notes, put at the apex of his poetry, he resorts to chivalry and history for 'moving accidents'; well aware, as he rather boasts than confesses, that they are 'not his trade'. And here, as in the later 'White Doe of Rylstone', the moving accident is only secondary to the true theme. It does, however, fill the whole front plane of the canvas, instead of being, as in 'The White Doe,' relegated with almost ostentatious disdain to a vaguely hinted background. In both he is seeking to emphasize the benignity of Nature, and the 'infinity' of suffering, by setting them in contrast with the brief excitement of the chase or the transient violence and

disasters of war. The death-leap of the Hart seems to be the climax of a hunting-story, and Sir Walter its hero. But there follows the real climax, in which Sir Walter becomes a passive listener while the wise old Shepherd describes the retributive desolation that has fallen on the spot where the Hart died; for

> The Being that is in the clouds and air,
> That is in the green leaves among the groves,
> Maintains a deep and reverential care
> For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

If in 'Hartleap Well' Wordsworth touches a romantic story to finer issues, in the far greater poem 'Michael' he makes a common story more completely his own by telling it with his 'bare sheer penetrating power'. This Lakeland shepherd is one of Wordsworth's grandest men. Shepherds, as he tells us in *The Prelude* (Book VIII), had been the first men to arrest his interest; they were bits of mountain expression, gradually disengaged; and Michael's had been the earliest story he heard of these living fragments of Nature. An earlier episode of it is finely told in the early version of Prelude VIII. And though it has now gathered a vibrating of passion and pathos only possible to Wordsworth from the days of 'The Ruined Cottage', Michael himself still retains that air of being a part of Nature which had first arrested the boy's imaginative gaze. The ruined sheepfold alone remains to tell of Michael's tragedy, as the ruined cottage of Margaret's; in these desolate relics left to the unchecked action of weather and decay, Wordsworth found a simple yet poignant symbol of the desolation wrought in the heart of Michael and of Margaret by the loss of son and husband. In 'Michael' the pathos is gathered into the single line—

once chosen by Arnold as the most Wordsworthian he ever wrote, which tells how Michael, after the boy's loss, 'never lifted up a single stone'.

Another memory—in this case drawn from his own and his sister's experience—was worked out, in these golden early years at Grasmere, in a poem of more complex, but less sustained power. The first title, 'Resolution and Independence', gives a hint of the Wordsworth of the war-sonnets who, only three months later (August, 1802), was to make heroic fortitude sublime in the Toussaint sonnet. And the lonely old man, stubbornly earning his living, is approached by way of a context more charged with human interest than the sequestered dell of 'Michael'; the morning splendour after a stormy night, the contrasted sequence of glorious young poets, Burns and Chatterton, dying in misery. And in the scene, half-dialogue, half-narrative, that follows, the prosaic and the imaginative, the frugal and the mystic strains in Wordsworth cross one another capriciously in the current of the stately stanza. A rolling Alexandrine conveys his affable greeting to a poor old fellow encountered on his walk:

> This morning gives us promise of a glorious day.
>
> . . . . .
>
> What occupation do you there pursue.'

But before the old leech gatherer has finished explaining his business and how his trade has fallen off in these bad times, the other Wordsworth has been evoked by the mere presence of this lonely man in this lonely spot:

> The old man still stood talking by my side;
> But now his voice to me was like a stream
> Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
> And the whole body of the Man did seem
> Like one whom I had met with in a dream.

But it was not only the men and women that touched Wordsworth's imagination; more than ever before, his joyous apprehension of Nature came to gather about the tender and exquisite creatures into which her life flows for a day or a season. Dorothy, walking by his side along the woods and lanes, had already at Alfoxden 'given him eyes and ears'. But it is only now that these quickened impressions of flowers and birds took shape in his poetry. They had already often taken shape in her delicate and supple prose, the more poetic in effect because it never for a moment aspired to be poetry. And now we can, as is well known, find actual parallels between the brother's poem and the sister's simple description of the same scene. So it is with the most famous of these, 'The Daffodils,' actually the fruit of a more distant walk to Gowborrow on the banks of Ulleswater.

Most of the flower poems belong to these early years (1800–1802) at Grasmere. Flowers did not exercise always the same kind of attraction. He loved the daisy and the celandine, as he loved the humble mirth and tears of Earth for which he turned away from the rare and the strange. They were the unassuming commonplace of Nature. But even the meanest flowers could also, under the stress of the graver mood of the Immortality Ode, become eloquent to his imagination in the thoughts too deep for tears. The celandine, 'kindly unassuming spirit' as it was, could now, when beaten down by the storm, become a symbol of the desolate old age of man. In the early Grasmere years he more often found the playful note of 'To a Butterfly' and 'The Redbreast chasing the Butterfly'. In the song to the lark he seeks, not with complete success, to reach a note of tumultuous lyric like the lark's own. It is neither, like Shelley's 'Skylark,'

a flight of lovely images of the Lark's song, nor, like Meredith's nightingale-poem, an elusively life-like imitation of the song in cunningly arranged vocables. Wordsworth's own 'Nightingale' is conceived with more self-criticism and self-knowledge. That 'tumultuous harmony and fierce' is not for this poet who, later on, will tell us how the gods demand the depth and not the tumult of the soul. His chosen singer is the brooding stockdove, whose voice is

> buried among trees,
> Yet to be come at by the breeze.

During those first Grasmere years, in which lyrics like these were almost daily thrown off, Coleridge, now living at Keswick only twelve miles away, was a constant visitor, almost an inmate. He was unhappy in his married life, and seeking a futile refuge in opium. The Townend Cottage offered a surer haven, but his confirmed melancholy distressed them more than his wonderful talk delighted them.

In April, 1802, Coleridge addressed to Wordsworth the Ode, 'Dejection', which lays bare the deepest ground of his mental anguish, the conscious loss of that shaping spirit of imagination which had been his from birth. The verse is in loveliness of music beyond the power of Wordsworth, but its lyric eloquence adds poignancy to the cry of self-reproach, not envy, which comes from him as he contrasts his brother poet with himself—the one surrounded by love, resolutely and, at this time, with almost unfailing inspiration day by day pursuing his great chosen work in poetry; the other suffering the frustration of his no less magnificent endowment by his own want of will. Only four years had passed since they trod the Quantocks side by side in the glory of unclouded genius.

It was while Coleridge was thus a constant visitor at Town End, that Wordsworth one night threw off those stanzas 'written in a Pocket copy of Thomson's Castle of Indolence', which remain the finest imaginative portraits of either poet, as they were in these early Grasmere days. He had just finished 'The Leech Gatherer', and perhaps, lighting on Thomson's charming vision of 'indolence', as he turned from his own picture of resolute and homely toil, he may have been allured by the thought of presenting himself and his friend as they dwelt in that Grasmere haven 'from earthly labour free, as happy spirits as were ever seen'. Both these happy spirits, we are told, have strange eccentric ways that puzzle or amuse the neighbours; but these are the vagaries of genius, and of the individual genius of these two. Shelley was to picture Coleridge at fifty:

> he who sits obscure
> In the exceeding lustre of the pure
> Intense irradiation of a mind
> Which with its own internal lightning blind
> Flags wearily through darkness and despair.

There is little to foreshadow the sombre sublimity of this later picture in Wordsworth's portrait of his great comrade at thirty:

> A noticeable man, with large grey eyes,
> And a pale face that seemed undoubtedly
> As if a blooming face it ought to be.
> Heavy his low-hung lip did oft appear,
> Deprest by weight of musing Phantasy;
> Profound his forehead was, though not severe;
>
> . . . . .
>
> Noisy he was, and gamesome as a boy;
> His limbs would toss about him with delight
> Like branches when strong winds the trees annoy.

Wordsworth's portrait of himself takes account, not without humour, of the impression made (according to later information) by the poet, as he 'booed' his 'pottery', on the Grasmere villagers:

> Full many a time, upon a stormy night,
> His voice came to us from the neighbouring height.
> Oft could we see him driving full in view
> At midday when the sun was shining bright.

And many anxious records in Dorothy's Journal, when she saw him outworn with poetic labour, are confirmed by the lines

> Ah! piteous sight it was to see this Man
> When he came back to us, a withered flower,
>
> . . . . .
>
> Down would he sit, and without strength or power
> Look at the common grass from hour to hour.

But the next stanza closes with a trait grandly expressive of the masterful inspiration of his own great hours, known only to himself:

> And his own mind did like a tempest strong
> Come to him thus, and drove the weary wight along.

IV

Coleridge was the companion, too, of the brother and sister in the first stages of their first tour in Scotland in the summer of 1803. Like the visit to Germany five years before, the Scottish tour was rich in poetry and poetry of a most distinctively Wordsworthian cast. He was not now indeed, as he had been then, without eyes for the new scenes and 'unknown men' among whom

he wandered. Once or twice, even, he tries, not without success, to capture a new note. Few would recognize as his, if 'encountered in the Sahara', the 'Rob Roy' stanzas which illustrate

> the simple plan
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can,

and the playful touches of dialect in 'Yarrow Unvisited' were not what he meant by the use of language actually spoken by men. But the new scenes touched some chords of inspiration never till now so clearly sounded. The grave of Burns at Dumfries called up the sense of profound spiritual kinship which he had felt in youth, and which the sequel had obscured but never effaced. The Highland maids with their shy elusive beauty, their natural grace, overcame the reticence which the lover of Annette had hitherto almost completely observed in poetry. In the lines to a Highland girl he openly expresses an attraction, such as he only admits elsewhere in the 'love-likings' at Hawkshead or on Como, of his far-off youth. Now, however, feminine beauty is touched with a new and exquisite delicacy. The girl of Inversnaid is a phantom of delight, a lovely apparition sent to be a moment's monument:

> Thou wear'st upon thy forehead clear
> The freedom of a Mountaineer!:
> A face with gladness overspread!
> Soft smiles, by human kindness bred!
> And seemliness complete that sways
> Thy courtesies, about thee plays;
> With no restraint, but such as springs
> From quick and eager visitings
> Of thoughts that lie beyond the reach
> Of thy few words of English speech.

And the maid is not precious to him as a presence, far less as a possible possession, only as a memory:

> Nor am I loth, tho' pleased at heart,
> Sweet Highland Girl! from thee to part:
> For I, methinks, till I grow old,
> As fair before me shall behold,
> As I do now, the cabin small,
> The lake, the bay, the waterfall,
> And Thee, the Spirit of them all!

An even more gracious spiritual charm invests the women who gave occasion, a few days earlier, to 'Stepping Westwards' and 'The Solitary Reaper'—the most perfect and the most Wordsworthian of all these 'Memorials'. The Highland Reaper, confessedly derived in part from a friend's description, is already, by her solitude, brought within that enchantment which for him made all loneliness an opening into infinity; the thought reverberates through the verse:

> Behold her, single in the field
> Yon solitary highland Lass,
> Reaping and singing by herself
> . . . . .
> Alone she cuts and binds the grain . . . .

So the voice of this lonely singer outdoes in enchanting power the cuckoo and nightingale whose song made earth seem a faery unsubstantial place; while it can also touch human hearts with heroic memories or familiar cares. These emotions we cannot share; the magic lies in the simple words which interpret the poet's wondering surmise.

The greeting, 'What, you are stepping Westward?'

given them by one of 'two well-dressed women' by Loch Katrine at sunset, wrought enchantment in the poet's imagination no less than the Reaper's song. This, too, happened 'in one of the loneliest parts of that solitary region'. And that 'stepping westwards' became itself an opening into infinity; the boundaries of the narrow scene fell away, and their path across the cold and dewy ground had no limit but the glowing heaven.[1] But infinity in Wordsworth is never far from the heart of man, and with this transcendent vision evoked by the greeting mingles 'a human sweetness' that will attend him on his endless way, as the Reaper's song was with him long after it was heard no more.

V

The early Grasmere years saw, finally, the completion of the great poem eventually called *The Prelude*, begun at Alfoxden. Though largely written in 1804, it carries the history of the poet's mind only up to that earlier climax of 1798 which saw his 'imagination restored' in the companionship of Coleridge and Dorothy. The new experiences of Grasmere were reserved, as we have seen, for the poem to be called *The Recluse* which remained a fragment. And though new motives and inspirations have come to Wordsworth's poetry since the Grasmere life began, and especially, as we shall see, since 1802, there is no trace of them in *The Prelude*. Wide differences of thought, faith, and poetic idiosyncrasy doubtless separate *The Prelude* until recently known (as published in 1850) from the Wordsworth of the early Grasmere

[1] Mr Bradley has finely noted the connection between Wordsworth's sense of infinity and his love of wandering, wanderers, and high roads (*Oxford Lect.*, p. 140, note).

years. But the poem that Wordsworth wrought between 1789 and 1804, as now made known by Mr de Selincourt, still reflects substantially the Wordsworth of Tintern Abbey.

The early steps in the composition of *The Prelude* have already been briefly told. But a final word must be added upon the poem as a whole. Wordsworth knew how unprecedented it was in literary history 'that a man should talk so much of himself'. He wrote after its completion, in 1805, to his friend Sir George Beaumont: 'It is not self-conceit that has induced me to do this but real humility. I began the work because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject, and diffident of my own powers. Here at least I hoped that to a certain degree I should be sure of succeeding, as I had nothing to do but describe what I had felt and thought.' It has already been told how, baffled by those 'more arduous subjects', he had thrown himself with rapture upon the task of telling his own life. He had not intended to give it the whole rich content of *The Prelude* we possess. Much of this was evidently designed originally for the great poem on Man, Nature and Society, to which it was to be introductory. Nor did he at the outset intend to carry it on to the great climax of Nether Stowey. As late as March, 1804, it was meant to consist of the first five Books, and to close with the first climax, his consecration to a life of poetry on the heights above Hawkshead (*Prel.*, IV, 320 f.). But looking back from the greater vantage-ground of Grasmere, he saw that that hour of consecration was a beginning, not a close; that the call to poetry had still to be tried, had to be subjected through six years to the strain of experience in the world, of misery, hardship, intellectual doubt and moral despair, before he reached,

through the reunion at Racedown, the more assured recovery, with which *The Prelude* actually closes.

Such a story had clearly something of 'epic' quality. Wordsworth himself, indeed, though he believed that in *The Recluse* he was embarking upon an epic theme of incomparable grandeur—'the mind of Man, the haunt and the main region of my Song'—did not claim such quality for the story of an individual mind, however eventful or significant. Yet, as Mr de Selincourt has justly said, 'those who regard the mind of Wordsworth as both great in itself and essentially representative of the highest, the imaginative, type of mind, will recognize its adventures as a fit theme for epic treatment'. They will, moreover, recognize that without owing anything to composition or arrangement, it has both the unity and much of the structure of epic. Yet a poet who was consciously bent on composing epic, and not on relating the growth of his mind, would not have interposed those somewhat disconcerting pauses—the Fifth Book on his boyish reading, the Eighth a 'retrospect' of what was already told; nor would he have allowed the Sixth Book (residence in London) to be left so 'unstitched' as, through mere fidelity to recollection, it remains. But interest and structural power return with the Ninth Book, his sudden plunge into the maelstrom of the Revolution when, by the Loire side, the spectacle of suffering more acute than he had ever seen, interpreted by the political philosophy of Beaupuy, drew Man for the first time into the highest plane of his interest. At the close of this Book, in its original form, he related—awkwardly when he is inventing, but with splendid moments when he is remembering—the story of 'Vaudracour and Julia' which, at those moments, was his own. The Tenth Book (Books X and XI of the final edition) tells

far from lucidly, but with wonderful reach of poetic and psychological power, the history of the years of tragic stress, from the shattering blow of the declaration of War to the 'crisis' when he 'yielded up moral questions in despair'. The Twelfth and Thirteenth Books describe, with little care for chronological sequence, but often in magnificent verse, the process of his recovery, culminating in the memorable tributes to Dorothy and Coleridge, the principal instruments of that poetic 'restoration'.

The Tale thus unfolded at length is very unlike that which the ordinary public, up to and beyond the close of his life, imagined to have been his. It is the life-story of no meditative dreamer, of no 'recluse' even, though this was the goal which he sought through the troubled vicissitudes of his first thirty years. Wordsworth in fact imposed, however unintentionally, a misleading and mischievous legend about himself upon the English world, even upon his most loyal and devoted followers, when he refused to publish *The Prelude* until after his death. 'By keeping back *The Prelude*', as Ker has justly said, 'Wordsworth made *The Excursion* his most authoritative work regarding his own temper and ideas. *The Prelude* is a story of life and will, not merely of meditations and theories. The purpose of the book is to show that his reflections spring from what is alive. Wordsworth's Life comes out as a life of pure energy from the beginning, wakeful, alert, self-willed.'[1] And this is even truer of the original version of the poem, before it had undergone the drastic rehandling in the poet's declining years represented by the 1850 text which alone Ker knew.

[1] Chambers' *Encyclopædia*, art. 'Wordsworth'.

VI

*The Prelude* carried the story of Wordsworth's poetic life only up to the moment of his 'recovery'; the moment when the long preparation for his poetic life-work was at length so far complete. But the poem itself was completed, as we have seen, only some four or five years after the settlement at Grasmere. It nevertheless represents, essentially, the Wordsworth of Alfoxden and of 'Tintern Abbey', and may thus be treated as the culminating poem of that phase of his genius.

But in the meantime certain changes of great moment had begun to operate, of which there is no trace even in the latest Books of *The Prelude*. While the poet of 'Tintern Abbey' remains unimpaired in quality, he now sees the human world with larger eyes, and has made new discoveries of his own power. Two years of uneventful quiet at Grasmere had been followed by the both outwardly and inwardly momentous year, 1802. The peace, the ensuing visit to Calais, and the resumption of the war, with the menace of invasion, and not least the rediscovery of Milton, enlarged the horizon and disturbed the plans of the recluse. There was no abrupt break or revulsion. The stubborn stuff of Wordsworth's nature yielded its habits gradually, or bit by bit. The common village stories allured him longer than even a 'selection' of the common village talk, or that 'selection' of it from which most of its homely virtue had escaped; while his hold upon the noble simplicity he had occasionally found became less secure. Milton, invoked as a great ally in England's need, was not to be listend to by a sensitive poet

save at a price—the price paid when he made the 'poor widow of Penrith' mourn for her son (in 'The Affliction of Margaret', 1804) in verse of untoward magnificence, which certainly could not have appeared in the first *Lyrical Ballads*:

> Perhaps some dungeon hears thee groan.
> Maimed, mangled by inhuman men;
> Or thou upon a desert thrown
> Inheritest the lion's den;
> Or hast been summoned to the deep.
> Thou, thou and all thy mates, to keep
> An incommunicable sleep.

Yet this majestic phrase and rhythm, whatever it owes to Miltonic suggestion, and however strangely it be fathered upon a 'poor widow of Penrith', is no mere borrowed music. It answered to deep rhythmical and verbal instincts in Wordsworth himself, which were later to get the upper hand and finally, denuded of their grandeur and retaining only their sonorous amplitude, to become the staple of his writing in prose and verse. This richer phrase and music came to him also when he regarded even the simplicities of Nature in the graver and more troubled mood of these years. The stanzas on the Lesser Celandine (1804) have an austere pregnant force which recalls, as Wordsworth so rarely does, the close-knitted thought of Donne:

> To be a Prodigal's Favourite—then, worse truth,
> A Miser's Pensioner—behold our lot!
> O Man, that from thy fair and shining youth
> Age might but take the things Youth needed not!

Near akin are the famous lines on 'Yew-trees', where the rebel Wordsworth resumes the once rejected device

of personification hallowed by poetic tradition; 'a pillared shade' where ghostly shapes

> May meet at noontide; Fear and trembling Hope,
> Silence and Foresight; Death the Skeleton,
> And Time the Shadow.

Yet the magnificence which Wordsworth thus occasionally reaches in a figured style not completely his own does not preclude moments in which the simplicity he is seeking is reconciled with the beauty of phrase and music that he so often missed, in a yet more consummate and wholly Wordsworthian poetry, as in that other stanza of 'The Affliction of Margaret':

> My apprehensions come in crowds. . . .

But Milton was to stir potentialities in Wordsworth of more moment than those of style. Nothing that Wordsworth wrote is more individual than his greater sonnets on Liberty, but it is certain that had not Milton put that 'trumpet' in his hands, he would not have achieved so consummate a strain.

The long, indecisive struggle with Napoleon, brought to a hollow close by the Peace of Amiens, was almost immediately renewed, with immensely heightened menace to this country. The peril of invasion became for some months very real. But the brief interval of peace permitted Wordsworth to revisit France, and to see Annette and the child who had been born to them ten years before. In the Spring of the same year Lord Lonsdale's repayment of his father's debt to the Wordsworth family put the poet in possession of a competence, and enabled him to marry. Of a marriage with Annette there could at this date be no question on either side. Neither was there, it is clear,

any breach of their friendship. The month spent at Calais in company with Annette, her daughter, and Dorothy, was notable chiefly for the seven sonnets composed there. It was followed, after three weeks in London, by his journey with Dorothy to the Yorkshire home of his bride, Dorothy's old schoolfellow, Mary Hutchinson, their marriage on October 4th, and the return to Grasmere three days later. Then Mary took her place unobtrusively beside Dorothy in the Dove cottage home, and Wordsworth, now in the companionship of two devoted women, entered upon those fifty years of married life which are to be read in the light, not of the matter-of-fact wedding-journey (or of the sonnet on Mary Queen of Scots composed during a pause for lunch), but of the exquisite tribute to her, as maiden and as wife,

> She was a phantom of delight.

But it is necessary to dwell somewhat longer on the Calais visit. Of the seven sonnets written there, one only is related to the reunion, and this it rather occasioned than inspired. When the story of Annette became known it was naturally at once recognized that the 'Dear child, dear girl' who walked with him on the Calais beach, and who appeared 'untouched by solemn thought' on that beauteous evening, was his own daughter Caroline. It was a strangely perverse criticism that had seen in her the beloved sister who had walked with him at Tintern. To her it could never have been said 'If thou appear untouched by solemn thought, thy nature is not therefore less divine'. For Dorothy's emotional response to the sublime goings-on of sea and sky and earth was even swifter than his own. The little French damsel of ten

was not spiritually Wordsworth's child. But intimations of immortality Wordsworth found in all children; and this one, too, with all her insouciance, bore within her the eternal presence of God; she was one of the children playing on the shore of the mighty waters, to whom our souls can return, 'tho' inland far we be'.

But the Calais visit had another and more important bearing upon Wordsworth's poetry: it contributed to reawaken in him the passionate concern for European affairs and for England's part in them, which had apparently slept in the recluse of Racedown and Alfoxden. It recalled to him the days when he had made common cause with the Girondists, and addressed his letter of vehement expostulation to an English bishop. And Calais itself stirred vivid memories of yet earlier days. It was from Calais that he and Robert Jones had set out, on the first anniversary of the taking of the Bastille (July 1st, 1790), upon their journey through newly liberated France; and the contrast between then and now was poignant. That 'young dawn' had led to a noon dark with coming storm. The 'homeless sound of joy' in the sky, the greetings on every tongue, the festal temper throughout the land, had passed; and the general adulation of Napoleon, just proclaimed Consul for life, only accentuated the Englishman's awareness of the huge peril with which Europe, and England—visible across the narrow seas under a brooding star—were now confronted. He had already, before the journey, in May, composed a sonnet on Napoleon; but it is untouched by thought of impending crisis. 'I grieved for Buonaparte with a vain and unthinking grief' was the earliest of those written under the direct stimulus of the sonnets of Milton, which

Dorothy had been reading to him just before. It is still imitative, almost a literary exercise. Napoleon is commiserated in the name of the lofty pacifism of whose claims Milton had reminded Cromwell. Wordsworth is indeed not yet thinking chiefly of the 'victories of peace' in public policy, but of the necessity of a gentle and tender up-bringing, in the home, not on the battlefield, for a ruler who is to be wise and good. In other words, he is still moving within the Alfoxden circle of ideas, the up-building of the individual mind.

But after the visit to Calais the defects of Napoleon's moral culture became a secondary matter. Wordsworth grasped the magnitude of the peril, for England and for Europe, which his power, now supreme in his own country, involved for liberty, the very condition of moral culture, of the life of the soul. And thus liberty, which the boy had taken for granted, and the young man unreflectingly embraced, but which, during his reaction from Godwin and the single-souled study of man's relation to Nature at Alfoxden, had ceased to be a central preoccupation of his thought and of his poetry, was drawn once more suddenly into its focus. But Wordsworth had not shifted his ground, nor in any real sense even changed his subject. He had only lifted into view, and proclaimed with magnificent energy, implications which he had not himself suspected in his own inmost convictions.

Yet this change of focus was in itself swift, and the month's sojourn in Calais in August, 1802, marks quite definitely the transition. He looked, for instance, on London with different eyes on his departure for France, and on his return. The famous sonnet written 'on the roof of a coach' as he drove over Westminster Bridge on the way to Dover, invested London with a

visionary glory like that of his own mountains in far-off Lakeland.

> Never did sun more beautifully steep
> In his first splendour valley, rock or hill.

Of the human London, political and commercial centre of England, he thought only in a single aspect—its teeming vitality, now lulled in sleep,

> And all that mighty heart is lying still.

But when, a month later, he returned through it, he saw London from a new angle. The grandeur and splendour of the city now wring from him a cry nearer to the anguished lament of Jeremiah than is elsewhere to be found in his works. Of the sonnet beginning

> O friend ! I know not which way I must look
> For comfort, being, as I am, opprest
> To think that now our life is only drest
> For show . . .
> Rapine, avarice, expense
> This is idolatry, and these we adore,—

he himself tells us: 'This was written immediately after my return from France to London, when I could not but be struck, as here described, with the variety and parade of our own country, especially in great towns and cities, as contrasted with the quiet, and I may say the desolation, that the revolution had produced in France.'

And it is now that he calls on Milton, no longer as a great exemplar of sonnet-writing, but as a supreme helper in England's need. No words of Wordsworth have sunk deeper into the national memory than these:

> Milton ! thou shouldst be living at this hour !
> England hath need of thee.

And what was her need? There is little enough of the national self-consciousness we now associate with patriotism. The man who had thought so long and so profoundly on the growth of the human soul, and who looked with more awe upon the mind of man than upon anything else in earth, held with more assured conviction than any of his contemporaries, that 'by the soul only, the nations shall be great and free' ('Written near Dover'). That did not exclude simpler and more universal joys: he felt, as never before, the thrill of 'treading the grass of England once again ('On the day of landing'). But it excluded still less what for Wordsworth was not an inference but an instinct, the attachment to the souls of other men and of other communities, as no less precious than his own. Hence, in these same days, he is chanting a noble requiem 'on the extinction of the Venetian republic', and a yet nobler—one of the sublimest of all his utterances—on the doom of the captured negro-chieftain Toussaint Louverture. In the prophetic passion of the closing verses several distinct strains of Wordsworth's poetic thinking are fused—the faith in Nature's working with man, wedded to him in this God-like universe ('there's not a breathing of the common wind that will forget thee'), passion for liberty, and the reverential awe for 'man's unconquerable mind'. And all the boy's exultation in difficult and dangerous adventure, even the man's real but reluctantly confessed joy in battle, springs into energetic and inspired assertion in the assurance: 'Thy friends are exultations, agonies . . .'

This sonnet, indeed, marks, more distinctly than any other, the point at which the emotional response to heroism, always ingrained and implicit in Wordsworth's nature, first becomes articulate in his poetry. The

ensuing years of desperate struggle with Napoleon touched this chord in him more powerfully and frequently than ever before. The public saw with astonishment what they took to be a new Wordsworth, who outdid as a poet of patriotism Scott and Campbell themselves. And yet it was plain to every critical eye that this Wordsworthian patriotic poetry stood apart in kind as well as in quality from even the most heartfelt and inspired strains of any contemporary.

How far this Wordsworth was indeed new, no one, owing to the suppression of *The Prelude*, could yet perceive. The notes sounded in the first London Sonnets after his return reverberate through the entire series produced at intervals during the war. Shame for England's weaknesses and vices, love for her and pride in her past; oppressive fear of the menace of Napoleon, and heroic reaction from the fear; ardour for the freedom of other nations also, and passionate sympathy with the heroes who had died in vindicating it. Milton had given the initial stimulus, and Miltonic the sonnets never cease to be in their massive eloquence, their prophetic vehemence, their accesses of tenderness. But they are never derivative, and Wordsworth's mind was too original, and both the outward situation and his own inner development too unlike, to allow of more than proximate resemblance. Milton's nature was even firmer and harder than Wordsworth's, and more completely set; and if his sonnets often show, like that on his blindness, the turning back of a thought upon itself, which the sonnet structure itself favours, we seek in vain in them the conflict of emotions which the real conflict of ideals in Wordsworth—the 'many movements in his mind'—sometimes involves in his. The thunder-burst of 'Avenge O Lord thy

slaughtered saints ' peals without break or pause throughout the sonnet's narrow room. But the conflict of anguish and exultant faith in Wordsworth gives drama and pathos to the great sonnet:

> When I have borne in memory what has tamed
> Great nations, how ennobling thoughts depart
> When men change swords for ledgers and desert
> The students' bower for gold, some fears unnamed
> I had my Country ! am I to be blamed ?

But now, when he sees his country become a bulwark of the cause of men, he is ashamed of those unfilial fears, and again feels for her ' as a lover or a child '. The prospect of invasion, in October, 1803, silenced his indignant rebukes, and called out all that was militant and heroic in his nature. It was not patriotism alone that inspired his heartening call to the ' men of Kent ', and his appeal to the memory of Killiecrankie. We detect in their fiery eloquence also that primeval joy in battle, of which his reason disapproved, which made him as he confesses in *The Recluse* unable to ' read a tale of two brave vessels fighting to the death without more pleasure than a wise man should '. And that sheer battle joy had its part in the exultant cry which, a few years later, breaks from him as empire after empire goes down before Napoleon, ' and we are left, or shall be left, alone, the last that dares to struggle with the foe ',

> O dastard, whom such prospect doth not cheer !

VII

No poet of Wordsworth's temper and quality could pass through the tremendous experience of the struggle with Napoleon wholly unchanged. In two points

especially that experience contributed to ripen tendencies perceptible only in the germ before. It quickened to full potency the stoic element in his passion for heroism. It is almost always failure, not success, however heroically won, that arrests his eye. His heroes are the leaders of desperate adventures, of forlorn hopes, Toussaint, Schill, Hofer, the Zaragossans. But Moscow and Leipzig found him silent; and Waterloo evoked a platitudinous pæan more eloquent of aridity than silence itself.

Secondly, the European struggle quickened the germ of international sympathy in Wordsworth. When he hailed the men of Kent in 1803 as 'bulwark of liberty', it was chiefly of British liberty that he thought. But Austerlitz and Jena mean for him less that Britain is now by so much the less secure than that the ranks of the embattled comrade-peoples leagued against the oppressor are by so much diminished. It was the intervention in Spain and Portugal, decried by the Whigs, that made the poet completely and passionately aware of the meaning of nationhood, and of the significance of nations, free and independent peoples, in the life of Europe and humanity.

These two lines of advance are the chief determining factors in two very unlike achievements of Wordsworth: the momentous group of poems centering in 1805—which include 'Peele Castle', 'The Happy Warrior', the 'Ode to Duty', and the completed Immortality Ode; in all of which the Wordsworthian stoicism has a determining share;—and on the other hand, hardly less great in prose than these in verse, the Tract on the Convention of Cintra (1809).

In 'Tintern Abbey' Wordsworth had expressed with

full consciousness a change brought about by years in his outlook upon Nature and the world. The dizzy raptures of his earlier manhood have faded, like the glad animal movements of his youth; but he feels only profound joy at the 'abundant compensation' he has gained. In *The Prelude* he traced in detail the history of the inner change thus wrought in him, culminating in the 'recovery' of imagination of which its great passages were the noblest attestation. The plan of his future work in poetry, as put forth in that so-called 'Fragment from the Recluse', contemplated simply a prolonged exercise of that imaginative apprehension of the world—the creation which the Mind and Nature 'with blended might accomplish'.

But in the group of poems just named a different point of view emerges. The stress is laid upon another type of mental energy, and upon situations and circumstances less withdrawn in inspired contemplation, more concerned with the buffetings and problems of active life. Rapturous vision is less prominent than will, spontaneous impulse than fortitude.

The simplest of the group is 'The Happy Warrior'. The death of his brother John in February, 1805, added deep personal emotion to the qualified homage which he, with the whole nation, paid to the heroic character ot Nelson, whose tragic end followed in the autumn. Buf both only contributed 'traits' to a character which may in other aspects be regarded as a kind of personification of the ideal of the Ode to Duty. He has 'an inner light', which makes the path before him always bright'; but it is the light of 'high endeavour', the intense inner life of which Wordsworth was conscious in himself, and which had habitually found its richest and most congenial

nourishment in rapt communion with Nature, he now sees to have a counterpart more universally accessible, and perhaps even more exalted, in the 'happiness' of heroic souls. His lofty spiritual egoism is still apparent; it is a pagan rather than a Christian hero who draws his last breath 'in confidence of heaven's applause'. And the conception of an ideal life which he had expressed in the 'Rainbow' verses—one in which all the days are bound together and the 'child is father to the man', has a counterpart in this plane of will and action in the first definition of the Happy Warrior as one who

> When brought
> Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought
> Upon the plan that pleased his childish thought.

'The Happy Warrior' is felt by most readers who come fresh to it to be somewhat surprising as an utterance of Wordsworth. It does not breathe of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The Grasmere of the recluse seems remote. Even the metre, the rhymed couplet of the eighteenth century, suggests a deliberate reversion to the 'heroic' manner of Pope's Homer. Another poem, yet more directly reminiscent of the death of his brother John, brings the earlier and the later mood into actual and acute antagonism. In the 'Elegiac Stanzas suggested by Sir G. Beaumont's Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm', the Wordsworth of 'The Happy Warrior' confronts what we may loosely call the Wordsworth of 'Tintern Abbey'. Wordsworth had once spent a summer month on the coast overlooking the Castle. The sea was throughout his stay of a glassy calm. Had he painted it then, he would have painted it thus—Nature, not as in Beaumont's picture 'in anger', but visibly benign, not threatening Man with ruin, but

clothed in Beauty as for her bridal with his soul. And he would have added

> the gleam,
> The light that never was, on sea or shore,
> The consecration and the Poet's dream.

But now a change has come:

> So once it would have been—'tis so no more;
> I have submitted to a new control;
> A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
> A deep distress hath humanised my soul.

And he renounces that aspiration after a Nature harmoniously accordant with the dreams of a poet recluse. He will be a man among men, and face Nature, however menacing her mood, with stoic valour and self-control:

> Farewell, farewell, the heart that lives alone,
> Housed in a dream at distance from the Kind!
> Such happiness, wherever it be known,
> Is it be pitied; for 'tis surely blind.
>
> But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
> And frequent sights of what is to be borne!
> Such sights, or worse, as are before me here,—
> Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

The same renunciation of a spontaneous and beautiful harmony, the same 'submission to a new control', inspires the contemporary 'Ode to Duty'. But the spontaneous harmony is here regarded with a more friendly eye, even with wistful and loving regret. Its power, instead of having gone beyond recall, is thought of as unconsciously anticipating the 'new control' itself; instead of setting a man in unreal and dreamy isolation

from his kind, as instinctively fulfilling the law of the universe which, under the new control, is recognized and obeyed.

> There are who ask not if thine eye
> Be on them, who in love and truth,
> Where no misgiving is, rely
> Upon the genial sense of youth :
> Glad hearts, without reproach or blot,
> Who do thy work and know it not ;
>
> Serene will be our days and bright,
> And happy will our nature be,
> When Love is an unerring light,
> And joy its own security ;
> And they a blissful course may hold
> Even now, who, not unwisely bold,
> Live in the spirit of this creed,
> Yet seek thy firm support according to their need.

The Wordsworth who looked back wistfully on the lost rapture of his youth's vision of Nature, whatever 'abundant compensation' he had found for it, looks with something of the same wistfulness upon the glad innocence of those who do duty's work and know it not. The 'new control' which he is deliberately accepting is only that of the law which they, with the 'genial sense of youth', fulfil. But instead of regarding their condition as once for all put by, he looks for a time when the law of duty will be universally fulfilled with a spontaneity like theirs.

And Man will then be once more at one with Nature. The optimist in Wordsworth still dominates his thought. He cannot contemplate moral conflict as a permanent process; the triumph even of Duty must not be won at the cost of anguish to the man who does her will; on the

contrary, he seeks to be relieved of the fatigue of his unchartered freedom, the weight of his chance desires :

> I long for a repose that ever is the same.

But this repose is not mere apathy; it is a new rapture, the rapture which flows not from the glad heart of youth, but from the man's recognition that he is at one with the law of the universe:

> Stern Lawgiver! Yet thou dost wear
> The godhead's most benignant grace;
> Nor know we anything so fair
> As is the smile upon thy face:
> Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
> And fragrance in thy footing treads,
> Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
> And the most ancient heavens thro' thee are fresh and
> strong.

Joy may thus still be divine; but it is a joy won through discipline and self-sacrifice. However remote in language and in the historic context of his thought, he is here at one with Kant when he found freedom to be the perfect obedience to law; and with Dante, when he saw that supreme power that moves the sun and the other stars to be Love.

## VIII

The 'Ode to Duty' was apparently, like most of Wordsworth's shorter poems, composed under a single impulse; and the mental conflict it expresses has induced no breach of continuity in its noble and flawless art. At the date of its composition (1805) another yet greater but less perfect work had been laid aside pending the discovery of an issue less from a conflict than from an actual

*impasse.* The Ode 'Intimations of Immortality' had remained for some years a fragment, ending at the close of the fourth stanza with a question:

> 'Whither is fled the visionary gleam? . . .'

It was only in 1806 that Wordsworth found, or believed that he had found, the answer, magnificent as poetry, but difficult and disputable as argument, conveyed in the remaining seven.

To the student of Wordsworth's mind the Ode has an interest which only *The Prelude* exceeds, and offers problems there alone paralleled. It is a revealing document of the crisis in his spiritual history in the years 1802–6, as *The Prelude* is of the crisis of 1793–97; and 'Tintern Abbey' of the lofty and solemn joy which followed. 'Tintern Abbey' is the presupposition of the Ode. The Ode resumes the theme of 'Tintern Abbey' from an altered angle. In 'Tintern Abbey' he feels only the deeper wisdom and insight which his ecstatic communing with Nature has brought. But the Ode opens with a cry, not the less poignant because it is conveyed in stanzas of majestic and harmonious poise, for the ecstatic communing which no longer is his. The 'visionary gleam' which once clothed meadow, grove, and stream with the semblance of celestial light has fled—whither? The poet cannot answer his own question; he knows only that there hath passed away a glory from the earth, and that in its place there lies about him something less and less distinguishable from 'the light of common day'.

For three years he remained thus. During a part of those years he was writing the account of his own recovery of imagination in the later books of *The Prelude.* In

that recovery the memory of his own childhood, we know, had played an important part, and his sense of the significance of childhood in the growth of mature manhood had found awestruck utterance:

> O mystery of man, from what a depth
> Proceed thy honours! I am lost, but see
> In simple childhood something of the base
> On which thy greatness stands.

The child-life is 'the hiding place of man's power', and the child is thus 'the father of the man'. Mr Garrod has suggested, with much likelihood, that this 'rainbow' poem, which Wordsworth prefixed to the Ode, may well have been the 'timely utterances which gave his heart relief' (st. 3). Hence his poetry of children has a unique character. Their beauty may 'make him glad', and he can feel and share the fullness of their bliss as they go flower-gathering on May morning. But this mood is always near to one of solemn awe. When he watches little Hartley Coleridge, at six, the child's carols are 'fitted to unutterable thought', its 'fancies are brought from afar'. Thus, in the Ode, after the break of years at the close of stanza 4, he returns to his question in a mood, even as Coleridge and many others have felt, of paradoxically sublime thought about the child. Its 'exterior semblance does belie its soul's immensity'; it is the 'best philosopher', the 'Eye among the blind'. But both the eighth stanza, in which these exalted phrases occur, and the fifth, sixth, and seventh, stand on a lower level, as thought and also as poetry, than the ninth, the crucial moment in the entire Ode. They are not, as this is, rooted in his own deepest experience, they merely put

forward a theoretic explanation of it which he thought sufficiently plausible for his purpose. 'I took hold of the doctrine of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorizing me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a poet'. There is no doubt that Wordsworth believed in pre-existence when he wrote, but this is not the language of conviction; and it is better in any case, as Mr Garrod has warned us, to leave Plato, whose idea of pre-existence was completely different, out of the question.

But the ninth stanza, without any mark of transition, is on surer ground. It interprets his own remembered experience. Wordsworth's account of his childhood in *The Prelude* does not suggest that he at any time felt himself a philosopher, an Eye among the blind, a Mighty Prophet and Seer, in possession of the truths which men toil all their lives to find. What it does suggest is that he in fear and awe vaguely apprehended powers about him vaster than his own. After the adventure on Ullswater with the borrowed boat, he says (I, 418 f.)

> for many days, my brain
> Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
> Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
> There was a darkness, call it solitude
> Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
> Of hourly objects, images of trees,
> Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
> But huge and mighty Forms, that do not live
> Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
> By day and were the trouble of my dreams.

These lines, as Mr Bradley has pointed out, express a condition hardly to be distinguished from that which in

the Ode Wordsworth gives thanks for as the peculiar privilege of childhood:

> those obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,
> Fallings from us, vanishings;
> Blank misgivings of a Creature
> Moving about in worlds not realized,
> High instincts before which our mortal Nature
> Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised.

And he goes on to interpret these 'high instincts' as

> those first affections,
> Those shadowy recollections
> Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
> Are yet the master light of all our seeing,
> Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
> Our noisy years seem moments in the being
> Of the eternal Silence.

There was, in other words, underlying that visionary splendour, something yet more precious which remains when it is lost; that sense of infinity ('Immortality') all about him which was the child's constant possession, though faded, is not extinct, and glimpses of it are never beyond our reach. A part, at least, of what Wordsworth means is expressed in the wonderful closing quatrain:

> Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
> Thanks to its tenderness, its hopes and fears,
> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

The 'glory of the flower', the splendour of the grass, have faded, but they are now fraught with a richer, more spiritual beauty and power; for they are linked with

the affections and emotions, with the life not of Nature only but of man. We see them now, no longer with the ecstasy of intoxicated senses (such as Wordsworth remembered, but had already outgrown in 'Tintern Abbey'), but with that finer sense, however we call it, which heard the music of humanity 'interfused' through the beauty of the visible scene. Wordsworth can never be understood if he is thought of as merely the 'poet of Nature'. Certainly he proclaimed Man's need of Nature, but it was Nature 'wedded' to man, creatively transformed by his mind and heart and thus alone capable of becoming that 'new earth and new heaven' which would startle the sensual from their dreams of death. Some elements of man's part in this creative process, the life of the heart, the philosophic mind, the power of eliciting soothing thoughts from suffering, had grown stronger and richer. All his visual memories had gathered a larger human content which even their faded visible forms recall, and are recalled by. Hence, far from grieving, he can 'find strength' in what remains behind. And by finding strength, he does not mean merely consolation for the loss. He means, as he meant in 'Tintern Abbey', a different thing—'compensation'. The 'Vision' itself was gone past recall. But two persuasions, rooted perhaps in the same instinct, impelled him to believe that the essential virtue of it was still within his reach. One was his conviction that mature manhood can and does draw support from experiences of childhood, themselves perhaps utterly forgotten and overlaid.

> For feeling comes in aid
> Of feeling, and diversity of strength
> Attends us if but once we have been strong.

The other was his, perhaps equally abnormal, doctrine that poetry is 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. From the crude ore of the original feeling, something precious emerges when the glow of emotion has faded. But this precious something is just the original matter seen in the imaginative light which is the condition of poetry. As the man can enrich his mature strength by recurring to those 'spots of time', full of vivifying virtue in his past, or by happening to come into a situation which recalled them, so the memory of our visionary childhood, recalled to a consciousness charged with the fuller experience and riper affections of maturity, may generate a mood greater and more potent than either this experience or those visions in themselves. For they communicate to the experience those 'intimations of infinity'[1] which attached to the child's imagination, even though the child's outlook on the whole be vanished past recall. Hence he can ascribe to these contacts with the child's mind the sublime potencies described in the closing lines of the stanza, they are 'fountain lights of all our day', master lights of all our seeing, they can set our moments of noisy life in their proper proportion in the silence of infinity; the whole being gathered up into the closing picture of the mature man, tranquilly ('in a season of fair weather') returning to the margin of that ocean of infinity where 'the children' play. He returns to it, indeed, no more to be a child, or to share their play. But the things that the passing of childhood has 'left behind', the man's 'philosophic mind', his 'thoughts that spring out of human suffering', are lifted to a higher plane because they are touched with that light of imaginative ecstasy still surviving in his 'heart of hearts'.

[1] 'Immortality' is the later, orthodox, Wordsworth's word for this.

This, we take it, is what Wordsworth essentially means, though, as Mr Garrod has said, Wordsworth has not expressed fully all he thought, nor attempted to fill the lacunæ which his sublime imagery is felt to leave.

And so the Ode which opened on a note too grave and majestic to be called a cry of desolation, closes, after a brief outburst of sheer lyric joy (opening of stanza 10), on a note again too grave and majestic to be called a pæan. The chorus of Nature, once so full of things speaking, is eloquent as ever, but its eloquence, if less poignant, is now richer because it reverberates through all the avenues of heart and mind.

> The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
> Is lovely yet;
> The clouds that gather round the setting sun
> Do take a sober colouring from an eye
> That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
> Another race hath been, and other palms are won.

And thus the child is indeed 'father of the man', and childhood with its vision, manhood with its wisdom, are 'bound each to each in natural piety'. The meanest flower can give him thoughts that often lie too deep for tears. And among these ineffable thoughts are those touched with the suggestion of infinity which had been the constant possession of his childhood.[1]

## IX

The 'great Ode', as it was very early called, closed the two volumes of Wordsworth's poems published in 1807, which enshrined, with the exception of *The Prelude*, and the so-called 'Prospectus' of *The Excursion*, almost all

[1] The above owes some suggestions to Mr Garrod's acute analysis.

his noblest work. Some of his acutest interpreters have maintained that the Ode also closes the epoch of his memorable achievements. This view rests upon the belief, which has made Prof. Garrod's remarkable book both narrower and (to our loss) shorter than it need have been, that Wordsworth had only one source of high inspiration, or even only one 'idea'. The Ode marks certainly the terminus of his thought and, apart from some pages of *The Excursion*, of his poetry, along one avenue—the interpretation of his own mind in communion with Nature. But his passion for liberty, the liberty of men and of nations, as it had matured later, so survived the collapse (if such it must be called) of that earlier inspiration. Its own collapse (if again that is the right word) was more explicit and unmistakable when it came. At the date of the Ode it had found magnificent expression, but it had not taken full possession of his mind, nor reached its fullest, most prophetic presentment. That was brought about two years later by the challenge of an outward event, the English expedition to the relief of the Peninsula, and its abortive first-fruits. It was in the 'Tract on the Convention of Cintra' (1809) that the recluse of Grasmere emerged definitely as the pioneer of the gospel of 'nationhood', anticipating by twenty years, as Dicey was the first to point out, its greatest prophet, Mazzini.

The occasion of the Tract is well known. The expedition sent in 1808 to aid the Spaniards and Portuguese in their resistance to Napoleon had begun with a notable military success. In August Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Wellesley defeated Marshal Dunot at Vimiera. But General Sir M. Dalrymple, his superior officer, shrank from pursuing this advantage, and signed at Cintra a Convention with the French which allowed them to

retire to France with their arms and booty. This virtual surrender of the Spanish and Portuguese cause, in total disregard of their wishes, roused widespread indignation in England, which the Government attempted to stifle. It nowhere excited a fiercer flame of anger than in far-off Grasmere. Wordsworth resolved to address not only the Government but his countrymen at large in a pamphlet which, like Milton's *Areopagitica* and Burke's *Reflections*, should drive home an argument of immediate urgency by basing it upon principles valid for all time. In November and the following months Dorothy describes him as painfully absorbed in work which imposed the severest nervous strain. On December 3rd she wrote to Mrs. Clarkson, 'his first and last thoughts are on Spain and Portugal'. In December and January two portions appeared in the *London Courier*. The entire Tract, owing chiefly to the slowness of publication at that distance from London, appeared only in May, 1809, when it could no longer affect the action of the Government. The delay was not due to slow composition. On the contrary, Wordsworth poured out his massed and impassioned thoughts with a torrent-like impetuosity which impaired the lucidity though not the power of the style, and gravely compromised both then and later his chances of being widely read. But the sentences, sometimes a page long, were not greater obstacles to general understanding or acceptance than the appeal everywhere made, in support of a clear and simple practical issue, to principles far beyond the range of current political or even philosophic thought. Yet the argument of the Tract was not mere theory. Wordsworth was master of the facts, and he uses them with the forensic skill he had shown in the Letter to Bishop Watson sixteen years before. With the special

issue we are not here concerned. Enough that, under influences in which Wordsworth probably had no share, the Peninsular War was resumed, with the results that we know.

The ground of Wordsworth's argument is not any question of policy, or even of 'honour', both of which he yet held to have been gravely infringed by the Convention, but an intense conviction that a nation to be fully a nation must be free from outer control. And this did not rest on a merely abstract notion either of freedom or of nationhood. The core of conservative instinct in him made him readily learn from Burke, as Dicey shows reason to hold that he did, that a nation is rooted in its past, that it is 'a solemn fraternity gathered together . . . under the shade of ancestral feeling'. National independence was, in Wordsworth's eyes, essential for the possession of civil liberty:

'The difference between inbred oppression and that which is from without [i.e. imposed by foreigners] is essential; inasmuch as the former does not exclude from the minds of a people the feeling of being self-governed; does not imply (as the latter does, when patiently submitted to) an abandonment of the first duty imposed by the faculty of reason.'

For Wordsworth, independence of foreign control, if it did not carry civil liberty with it, immensely encouraged and facilitated it. Of itself it tended to dissolve oppressive customs at home. Nay, Wordsworth believes that 'superstition' itself will relax its hold upon the minds of a liberated nation; meaning the Catholicism of Spain, a stumbling-block to many other of her English sympathizers. His glowing words of reassurance to these doubters

are too characteristic of Wordsworth's ideal passion, and of his limitations, to be spared:

'Short-sighted despondency! Whatever mixture of superstitions there might be in the religious faith or devotional practices of the Spaniards, this must necessarily have been transmuted by that triumphant power, . . . from the moment in which it coalesces with fervent hope. The chains of bigotry which enthralled the mind must have been turned into armour to defend and weapons to annoy. . . . And the types and ancient instruments of error, where emancipated men showed their foreheads to the day, must have become a language and a ceremony of imagination; expressing, consecrating, and invigorating, the most pure deductions of Reason and the holiest feelings of universal Nature.' (ed. Dicey, pp. 115–6.)

And it is clear that if Wordsworth was a prophet and pioneer of 'nationalism'—the right of every nation to independence—this was not because his passion for emancipation was enriched and deepened by historic appreciation of the diversities of national genius. Sixty years later, a no less ardent emancipator, Swinburne, pictured the Nations joining in a 'Litany' to Freedom, each in a voice eloquent with her historic memories, her treasured traditions and legends. In this way of approach to nationalism, Wordsworth falls far behind contemporaries like Scott and Southey, who had no glimmer of his nationalist ideals. Not because he was not, as is sometimes thought, well-read. The reading of Wordsworth and Dorothy at Grasmere was slight and amateurish beside that of Shelley and Mary in Italy; but it was still wide and in several foreign literatures. He had read Calderon, he had read Michelangelo. But he was conspicuously poor,

nevertheless, in what Matthew Arnold taught us to call *culture*. His foreign reading had not entered into his blood, or tempered in any degree the tough English and North-country habit of his mind. His notorious dismissal of France in 1802, as a land afflicted equally with 'a want of books and men', is less to the discredit at that moment even of one who knew her so well, than his total blindness, thoroughout life, to the momentous spiritual and literary revolution which had from the days of his birth until past his prime given to Germany the intellectual primacy in Europe.

All the more notable then is the clearness with which Wordsworth proclaims freedom from foreign control as a condition of national life, and the necessity therefore of securing it for Spain, Germany, Switzerland, and all other countries suffering from foreign aggression. And the principle is not less clearly affirmed because Wordsworth, unlike Shelley and Byron, saw in the independence of these nations a condition of England's own independence. Of Shelley's rapturous homage to Greece, of Byron's glowing hymn to Rome—'my country, city of my soul!' —Wordsworth was certainly incapable. But Byron and Shelley would, on their part, have disdained the passion for England and for English freedom, which is an integral element in the nationalism of Wordsworth. It is the glory of Wordsworth's patriotism that the passionate devotion (the feeling 'of a lover or a child') which it inspired for England co-existed with an uncompromising assertion of the liberties of other nations and, when these were violated, with such white heat of anger, unparalleled since Milton, as flames through the pages of the Cintra Tract.

But we shall gravely misunderstand Wordsworth it we take either his patriotism or his nationalism to be a

mere demand for release from external oppression. No mere exemption from thwarting conditions is in his mind when he speaks of freedom; but a lofty spiritual excellence —'for by the soul only the nations shall be great and free'. In other words, the passion for heroism which inspired so many of the war-sonnets, discovers itself again at the heart of the great political Tract. The Tract was primarily an attempt to vindicate their threatened liberty for Spain and Portugal. But it was also a great song of the heroism of soul manifested in this great crisis of their national existence. And even the sonnets do not rise to higher notes of poetry than the prose sentences in which this brooding poet of tranquillity (as he is often thought) declares that man will always be found more than equal to whatever fate may befall him; it is his fate which, save at challenging crises like this, does not satisfy the need of his spirit:

'The passions of men (I mean the soul of sensibility in the heart of man)—in all quarrels, in all contests, in all quests, in all employments, which are either sought by men or thrust upon them—do immeasurably transcend their objects. The true sorrow of humanity consists in this—not the mind of man fails; but that the course and demands of action and of life so rarely correspond with the dignity and intensity of human desires. . . . But, with the remembrance of what has been done, and in the face of the interminable evils which are threatened, a Spaniard can never have cause to complain of this, while a follower of the tyrant remains in arms upon the Peninsula.'

The judgment pronounced upon Wordsworth's attitude to the Revolution and the War by a fine scholar

and critic, master both of his poetry and of revolutionary history, is nowhere more completely justified than at this crisis and in this Tract: 'It was always evident that through the fiery trial of the Revolution and the Napoleonic tyranny, he kept a saner judgment as well as a more heroic temper, than any man in this country, probably than any save a very small remnant, in the whole of Europe.'[1]

The forcible essay of the late Prof. Dicey was written to vindicate what he imagined he should surprise his readers by calling 'The Statesmanship of Wordsworth'. Few readers will now be surprised; but neither will they entirely endorse Dicey's judgment, influenced as it was by the passions of the great struggle in the midst of which (1917) he wrote. We are perhaps indebted to this bias for the clearness and vigour with which he expounded Wordsworth's assertion of the rights of national independence (he saw in the Peninsular campaign a parallel to the English intervention on behalf of Belgium), and for his vindication of Wordsworth's political consistency throughout the revolutionary and Napoleonic crises. Wordsworth, he justly declared, was at the core conservative, however apparently revoluntionary, under particular conditions, his expressions; and he compared him in this respect with Burke, long since similarly vindicated in the same sense by Morley. But Dicey probably overstated the actual influence of Burke upon the Tract, not knowing (what was first disclosed by Mr de Selincourt's discoveries) that the splendid tribute to Burke in *The Prelude* which he took to be of 1804, appears in no version earlier than 1820. He also, in his eagerness to capitalize Wordsworth's military ardour against Napoleon for the yet more terrific struggle in the very crisis of which he

[1] The late Prof. C. E. Vaughan, in *Mod. Lang. Review*, xi, 487–8.

wrote, excusably overshot the mark. For Wordsworth, earnestly deprecating as he did any Peace that stopped short of complete victory, yet sought no more than to reduce France to the limits required by a balance of powers. He did not contemplate, he would deeply have condemned, a Peace of Versailles.

It only remains to ask what practical effect Wordsworth's Tract had upon English opinion, then and later. The question of the moment, which had provoked the Tract, it could not influence; for, as already stated, the Convention of Cintra was virtually annulled before it was published. But its significance was not limited to this. It was a powerful appeal for energetic prosecution of the war against Napoleon until his power was destroyed. The Peninsular campaign had been from the first the work of the Tories, stubbornly opposed by the Whigs. It was the work of the inheritors of Burke, opposed by the successors of those who in defence of the American Colonies had been his allies. Wordsworth was in the Tract supporting a Tory policy by arguments addressed to all vindicators of freedom, and in part identical with those applied by Burke himself against the Tories of that day. Hence, however small the immediate and direct effect of the Tract, measured by its sale, it performed the momentous service of bringing into line the vindicators of national freedom and the opponents of Napoleon in united prosecution of the War. Wordsworth's Tract could never, like Burke's 'Reflections', have turned back the current of a national movement; it concurred with, and perhaps accelerated, a movement rapidly becoming national when he wrote. But neither was he merely voicing impulses or ideas already 'in the air'. In his assertion, as universal principle of nationalism, he was,

as we have seen, no echo of any man, but a prophet. Unhappily he became cold to his own message and turned a deaf ear to the struggles of Italy against the alien governments imposed upon her. When Mazzini, in the 'thirties, raised his voice, Wordsworth had long passed in foreign as in home politics for a reactionary, and it was not only the brevity of political memory that was to blame if his part as Mazzini's herald was forgotten. That this was not the whole story even of the politics of the later Wordsworth will be seen in the final chapter—'Aftermath.'

## VIII

## THE EXCURSION

The 'Prospectus' prefixed to *The Excursion* undoubtedly justified its readers in expecting grand poetry. He had deliberately invoked the example of Dante and Milton, and in language of a sublimity worthy of either. He would ascend, with the help of 'Urania or a greater Muse', to regions to which the heaven of heavens was but a veil, and plunge into the awful depths of the human mind. They had, then, some reason for disappointment, and the hostile Jeffrey some excuse for his 'This will never do', when these magnificent verses, this promise of epic matter and epic sublimity, were found to herald a poem of epic scale indeed but as devoid of epic quality as its title, chosen with the author's usual unlucky fidelity to the least poetic aspect of the truth, would suggest. It is true that this *Excursion*, with its leisurely and desultory movement from one charming spot to another in the Lake country, its discourses by a solitary tarn and in a country churchyard, and its culminating moment—tea in the vicarage—has at least the unity of a continuous argument, and that the argument has its splendid moments. Granted, it might be said, that Wordsworth has dropped all the apparatus of epic, the warring hell and heaven of Milton and Dante as well as the warfare and the voyagings of Homer, was a great poem impossible in which the

argument was carried on by the purely intellectual instrument of discourse? Was not this achieved by Lucretius? The answer must be that Lucretius' poem is great not because it expounds a philosophy, nor because that philosophy itself is a grandiose synthesis of the universe; but because the poet's exposition is itself an act sublime and heroic. Like a Hebrew prophet he stands forth to save his people, the whole race of men; a lonely explorer of untrodden wilds, he comes to 'free the soul from the strangling knots of superstition'. The grandeur of situation is implicit in the whole poem; heroic ardour is its temper from beginning to end. The poem of Lucretius would clearly have been yet greater had he, like Dante, added to this grandeur of situation, expounded his saving philosophy through the instrument of a sublime and heroic action. *The Excursion* can claim greatness on neither score. He had already in *The Prelude* found his way to a poem which had some of the elements of epic greatness, an epic of which he was himself the hero. But he is wholly unconscious of the disparity which the criticism of posterity finds so patent between the two poems. The one he left in the rough and withheld from publication; the other he deliberately put forward as the crowning expression of his genius, the 'cathedral' of which *The Prelude* was the 'ante-chapel', and all his earlier poems already published the 'little cells, oratories and sepulchral recesses'.

All claim to intrinsic greatness being then dismissed, *The Excursion* remains nevertheless an important and memorable poem. The 'cathedral' resumes in its details many of the rare beauties of the 'cells' and 'ante-chapel'. The 'argument', the vindication of Man's right to hope, is in its ethical and historic bearings as

far-reaching as Milton's 'Vindication of the Ways of God'. Of the four leading characters, three—the Wanderer, the Pastor, and the poet himself—uphold the cause of hope, the fourth, the Solitary, impugns it. The 'action' is thus, at bottom, the process of an argument. It reaches its culminating moment in the Fourth Book, the debate between the Wanderer and the Solitary, 'Despondency' defended by the latter, and 'Corrected' by the former. The cause of Hope is then, in the Churchyard, supported by the Pastor with a series of stories relating the lives of those who lie buried there, and finally applied by the Wanderer to a criticism of the social conditions of England.

The subject is approached by way of that story of Margaret, or 'The Ruined Cottage', which had been written at Racedown and Alfoxden, which had excited the boundless admiration of Coleridge, and which remains Wordsworth's highest achievement in the beauty of tragic sorrow and unrelieved desolation. He had had no thought, then, of tempering that tragedy, or suggesting consoling thoughts. But now the story is needed to introduce the high argument for optimism. It is told, then, by the Wanderer, the principal sponsor of Hope, and in order that his comment shall be authentic, his own history is set before us in a piece of poetic biography or autobiography which in its greater moments recalls or resumes 'Tintern Abbey' and the early books of *The Prelude*. The Wanderer is meant, we are told, to be such a man as the poet himself would have been had he been brought up as a pedlar. In him too, then, he distinguishes the epochs of growth—the Boy, herding the cattle on the hills, and while still a child perceiving 'the presence and the power of greatness', and gathering those impressions

which were to be, as in Wordsworth himself, the 'hiding places of the man's power'; then the Youth, experiencing such hours of rapt communion with Nature as had been known to Wordsworth himself:

> Sound needed none
> Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
> The spectacle, sensation, soul, and form
> All melted into him; they swallowed up
> His animal being; in them did he live
> And by them did he live, they were his life.
> In such access of mind, in such high hour
> Of visitation from the living God
> Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.

We are thus led to the picture of serene and philosophic old age and warned to remember that Nature and Wisdom demand cheerfulness:

> At this still season of repose and peace . . .
> Why should we thus with an untoward mind . . .
> From natural wisdom turn our hearts away
> To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears . . .?

At the close of the Tale accordingly, when the poet has turned away to hide his emotion, the old man gently checks him, recalling how he had himself overcome the first impulse of sympathetic grief:

> My Friend, enough to sorrow you have given,
> The purposes of wisdom ask no more . . .

But the Second Book promises, if not drama, at least debate; if not a Satan or a Mephistopheles, at least a 'sceptic' who will compel the philosophic Wanderer and his reflex the Poet to call in ampler resources of argument than they have yet had occasion to use. And the

scenes which prepare for the discussion—the classic description of the upland valley of Blea Tarn, the funeral procession, the first sight of the Solitary himself, consoling the bereaved and weeping child with 'red ripe currants', and the cordial meeting of the two old friends, have indeed genuine charm. Even the discovery of Candide—'dull product of a scoffer's brain'—is an excellent opportunity, which serves only to enlist our interest for the reader of the dull book. The Solitary is drawn confessedly from the republican preacher Fawcett, to whom Wordsworth in his Godwinian days had listened with more sympathy than he now approves or will admit. But he too, like the Wanderer, is partly Wordsworth himself. The Wordsworthian traits are not here consciously imposed; they steal in, involuntarily, through the lure which (as in the Leech-gatherer and the Highland Reaper) 'solitude' in the heart of Nature exercised upon the poet's imagination. The Solitary's story of the fellow-inmate who through carelessness was allowed to perish from exposure is meant to score a point against the virtue of the mountain-dwellers, but it is told in a style indistinguishable from the Wanderer's story of Margaret; and the authentic Wordsworth speaks through him when he describes the glory and gloom of his mountain home, the

> two huge peaks
> That from some other vale peer into this,

—the lofty brethren who, when storm rides high, chiefly bear their part in the wild concert,

> then all the upper air they fill
> With roaring sound, that ceases not to flow
> Like smoke along the level of the blast,
> In mighty current.

The sceptic has even heard that more mysterious music which the mountains gave forth to Wordsworth's ear:

> Nor have Nature's laws
> Left them ungifted with a power to yield
> Music of finer tone; a harmony
> So do I call it, though it be the hand
> Of silence, though there be no voice; the clouds,
> The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,
> Motions of moonlight, all come thither, touch
> And have an answer.

The Solitary too has had his sudden visions upon the mountains; like the poet on Snowdon, he has stepped forth into sudden glory:

> A single step, that freed me from the skirts
> Of the blind vapour, opened to my view
> Glory beyond all glory ever seen
> By waking sense, or by the dreaming soul! . . .

The Third Book is devoted to the history of the Solitary, and the formation of the 'despondency' which the poet, through the Wanderer, is to 'correct'. It is the despondency of a generous and passionate nature, which private disaster and public disillusion have deprived of hope and faith. The dawn of the Revolution had thrust aside for a moment the poignancy of private grief:

> Society became my glittering bride
> And airy hopes my children,

but with its failure he lost faith in God and Man, which the Bible and the unspoilt humanity beyond the Atlantic proved alike unavailing to restore. From these futile quests he has returned to an existence sequestered, but 'not comfortless', cherishing for himself no hope but

that the tranquil stream of his life may finally reach 'the unfathomable gulf where all is still'.

Then the Wanderer enters upon the argument which is the chief purport of the poem. Much of it has merely the interest of eloquent reasoning and accomplished verse. Whether the appeal to Christian theology is as persuasive to-day as a century ago, matters no more than analogous questions about the theology of *Paradise Lost*. What does matter is that the belief at which he had now arrived had only his reason and his piety, not his poetry, on its side.

Some of the reasoning, nevertheless, retains the trace of the intense and highly individual experience mirrored in 'Tintern Abbey' and the great Ode. Thus the Wanderer refuses to justify the Solitary in despairing because the glowing visions of his youth had faded. He too had known those raptures, and had found for their loss 'abundant recompense'. Youth and manhood change and pass, but the eternal things remain, and it is the loftiest part of us which aspires to them. Hope is not easy, but it is difficult because man's ideal aspirations are without limit.

> I must needs confess
> That 'tis a thing impossible to frame
> Conceptions equal to the soul's desires.

In the whole argument of this passage we are listening to the poet-statesman who had spoken trumpet-tongued five years before in the Cintra Tract, where this great saying is verbally anticipated.

Thus Hope, though more rational than despondency, was difficult. Wordsworth was saved from a cheap optimism by the idealism which saw no limits to the aspiration of the soul of man. Then he turns to the

Solitary's loss of faith in 'social man', the despondence induced by the failure of the Revolution. Those transports the Wanderer too had once shared. If he shares them no longer, it is not because his hope for humanity has flagged. But Man can be redeemed only by the operation of his own virtue, by knowledge of facts and knowledge of himself. The enemy has triumphed justly by superior energy and firmer faith over opponents vacillating and inconsistent. He waits in hope

> To see the moment when the righteous cause
> Shall gain defenders zealous and devout
> As they who have opposed her; in which Virtue
> Will to her efforts tolerate no bounds
> That are not lofty as her rights; aspiring
> By impulse of her own ethereal zeal;
> That spirit only can redeem mankind.

Thus the argument for Hope is made to rest upon man's realization of the powers he possesses. If man is to erect himself he must do it by his own activity. And again he calls in the Wordsworthian principle that childhood is the hiding-place of man's power, and bids the Solitary revisit the scenes of his youth, and revive early memories, for 'Strength attends us if but once we have been strong'. But a still more remarkable development of the demand for energy follows. Even superstition, the putting forth of Fancy, is better than apathy. The poet who had once cried 'Great God, I'd rather be a pagan suckled in a creed outworn' than a man utterly insensible to Nature, now in a famous passage, which enchanted the author of 'Endymion', seriously sends the Solitary to school with the Greeks. Let him close his cynical Voltaire, and study how the fancy of unenlightened Grecian shepherd or hunter fetched divine forms from sun and moon,

nourishing thereby the Admiration, Hope and Love by which we live.

The argument culminates in the assertion by an image of extraordinary beauty, set forth with Miltonic (yet not derivative) amplitude of phrase and music, of the soul's power to transmute all the obstructive elements of its experience into new sources of strength:

> Within the soul a faculty abides
> That with interpositions, that would hide
> And darken, so can deal that they become
> Contingencies of pomp; and serve to exalt
> Her native brightness. As the ample moon
> In the deep stillness of a summer even
> Rising behind a thick and lofty grove
> Burns, like an unconsuming fire of light,
> In the green trees; and, kindling on all sides
> Their leafy umbrage, turns the dusky veil
> Into a substance glorious as her own,
> Yea, with her own incorporated, by power
> Capacious and serene. Like power abides
> In man's celestial spirit; virtue thus
> Sets forth and magnifies herself; thus feeds
> A calm, a beautiful, and silent fire,
> From the encumbrances of mortal life,
> From error, disappointment—nay, from guilt;
> And sometimes, so relenting justice wills,
> From palpable oppression of despair.

The 'correction' of despondency is thus indeed effected by calling into play 'nothing more than what we are'. But 'what we are' is that which by our spiritual energies we have power to become. So, he concludes,

> So, build we up the Being that we are,
> Thus deeply drinking in the souls of things
> We shall be wise perforce.

With the opening of the Fifth Book the scene, and in some degree the method, of the poem changes. We leave the sequestered mountain solitude, where the Solitary has his home or his haunt, and descend to a wide valley with a copious stream, a crystal lake, scattered farms and homesteads, a grey old church, a churchyard, and a stately parsonage. With this changed setting the growing dominance of Anglican orthodoxy in Wordsworth's mind, hitherto only occasionally apparent in *The Excursion*, becomes unmistakable. The Ecclesisastical Sonnets are already in sight when the poet pauses to describe the monuments in the church walls, to defend the rite of baptism, to explain the authoritative status of the Priest among his flock, the feudal dignity of his mansion; when, finally, the primacy in the argument is openly transferred to him by the Wanderer's appeal to his more authentic wisdom.

The tales told by the Pastor are thus offered primarily as 'solid facts' in support of a cheerful view of life. It is better to leave aside the question of the value for argument of a series of facts chosen at the discretion of one interested in a particular interpretation of them, and to consider rather the remarkable range of character-types which Wordsworth here handles with knowledge and power. Here at least he is not the poet of the peasant only; and the benign touch which at some point in all these histories emerges, is singularly varied in kind. None of them has more natural charm than the opening story of the quarryman and his wife, not yet tenants of the graveyard there, but living in the rude hut visible high up on the mountain; a life of cheerful content with the hardships of their lot. The Miner's story is more chequered; he had sought for precious ore with unconquerable tenacity, but in vain, for years; then, at last discovering

it, plunged into dissipation and vanished. But like one of Browning's failures he is redeemed by his strength of purpose, and though he is lost, the track he daily traversed remains and is known as the Path of Perseverance. Others, by various operations, heal themselves. The rejected lover (VI, 192 f.) turns to books and science, and by slow degrees his 'fluttering nerves are composed', and 'the jarring thoughts to harmony restored'. A proud and despotic woman (VI, 675 f.) offers more prolonged resistance to the benign influences.

> Surpassed by few
> In power of mind and eloquent discourse;
> Tall was her stature; her complexion dark
> And saturnine; her head not raised to hold
> Converse with heaven, nor yet deprest towards earth,
> But in projection carried, as she walked
> For ever musing. Sunken were her eyes,
> Wrinkled and furrowed with habitual thought
> Was her broad forehead. . . .

She was enthralled by passions, and finally stricken down with disease; yet in the end was subdued to meekness, and sank with resignation into her grave. With her is contrasted the 'amiable' Ellen, who suffers outrage and cruelty, is forcibly separated from her child, and yet ends in edifying submission to the divine will. For a moment, at the instance of the Wanderer, the Parson turns aside to the unrelieved gloom of the story of the suicide Wilfrid Armathwaite (VI, 1079) who, though absolved by God,

> could not find forgiveness in himself,
> Nor could endure the weight of his own shame.

But the gloom is immediately relieved by the charming picture which follows, of a widower who finds consolation

for his bereavement in the affection and gaiety of his six daughters. Here indeed (VI, 1114 f.) 'despondency' is utterly out of place:

> Thrice happy, then, the Mother may be deemed,
> The Wife, from whose consolatory grave
> I turned, that ye in mind might witness where
> And how, her Spirit yet survives on earth!

More cogent, and perhaps the finest, as story, of the series, is the history which opens the Seventh Book, of the clergyman who (like George Herbert, but hardly in his spirit) comes from the brilliant life in society to a modest cure among the mountains. The joyous family cortège crossing the fells from Northumbria, the establishment of the new home, are told with many happy strokes. Here he finds content in faithfully doing his duty; though the past, mastered, is not effaced:

> For he still
> Retained a flashing eye, a burning palm,
> A stirring foot, a head which beat at nights
> Upon its pillow with a thousand schemes, . .
> A man of hope and forward-looking mind
> Even to the last.

The Pastor can tell, too, of men with bodily infirmities who here found peace and hope, were a source of wisdom to others; how the deaf man became the object of universal sympathy and love, the blind man rose above his disability by intellectual force. In this sequestered church, too, the bitter antagonisms of politics may become reconciled; and he tells of two courtly figures, a flaming Jacobite and sullen Hanoverian, in whom was wrought 'such leaning towards each other' that their days by choice were spent in constant fellowship, and on the spot where they

had been wont to sit together, by their direction a monument was raised over their undivided remains.

But the sequestered churchyard has other links with the great world, and with England's titanic struggle, now at its height. Wordsworth the recluse becomes once again Wordsworth of the war-sonnets in the stories, which close the series, of the heroic youth who leads the little troop of volunteers from the peaceful valley, and of the knight of a past day, Sir Alfred Irthing, who fulfilled his vow 'to labour for redress of all who suffer wrong and to enact by sword and lance the law of gentleness'. And the Book closes with the Wanderer's summing up of the purport of these stories. Nowhere does Wordsworth show a livelier command of varied types of men and women. Yet we are here peculiarly aware of the limits of Wordsworth's field of view. The Solitary joins us in the Wanderer's courteous thanks to the Pastor, but the 'correction' of his Despondency is still incomplete.

In the Eighth Book, as if aware of the wider bearings of the problem, the poet leads us in thought from his secluded Lakeland to the regions of England in which hope is pursued under severer handicaps. He bitterly exposes and denounces the passing, with the spread of science and manufacture, of those simple manners, that homely family life, that 'peace', sobriety and chaste love, which are the conditions of true well-being and happiness. But such regrets convey little of the gist of Wordsworth's social criticism. The clue to the philosophy of *The Excursion* is given, not by these laments for the decay of simple manners, but by the emphatic assertion which opens the Ninth Book, that 'an active principle pervades the universe, its noblest seat being the human soul'. Man must not be a passive tool, but be free 'to

obey the law of life, and hope, and action'. Hence his attack upon the factories, which not only break up the family life but enslave the worker, crushing the spirit out of very childhood, 'the hiding-place' for him, we know, 'of man's power'. After describing the dull and deformed figures of the young hands as they creep out of the factory, he cries:

> Is this the form,
> Is that the countenance, and such the port
> Of no mean Being? One who should be clothed
> With dignity befitting his proud hope;
> Who in his very childhood should appear
> Sublime from present purity and joy!
> The limbs increase, but liberty of mind
> Is gone for ever.

But Wordsworth's was not, as is often thought, a one-sided indictment of the industrial revolution, and of the economists who defended it. He was equally alive to the degradation of the country child who grew up, even in the heart of Nature, without gaining that fundamental liberty of mind:

> Mark his brow
> Under whose shaggy canopy are set
> Two eyes—not dim but of a healthy stare—
> Wide, sluggish, blank, and ignorant, and strange—
> Proclaiming boldly that they never drew
> A look or motion of intelligence
> From infant-conning of the Christ-cross row
> Or puzzling through a primer, line by line.
>
> . . . . .
>
> What kindly warmth from touch of fostering hand,
> What penetrating power of sun or breeze,
> Shall e'er dissolve the crust wherein his soul
> Sleeps, like a caterpillar sheathed in ice?
> This torpor is no pitiable work
> Of modern ingenuity. . . . This boy the fields produce.
> . . . What liberty of *mind* is here?

And it was precisely his passionate insistence on 'liberty of mind' for all classes of the population, that made Wordsworth the advocate, and one of the earliest in the country, of universal and compulsory education, the organized discipline which frees the soul from the bondage of ignorance. The famous passage[1] derided, little to his credit, by Matthew Arnold, is not great poetry, but it is an intellectually weighty utterance, and the climax, on the constructive side, of the argument of *The Excursion*. It is also the link between this poem, mainly addressed to the correction of individual despondency, and the early poetry and prose which drew into its purview the affairs of the nation and the fate of Europe. In liberty of mind thus founded upon discipline in virtue, England will become a nation truly free. And we need not resent as merely vainglorious, in 1814, the exultant patriotism which inspires the Wanderer's glowing peroration:

> Your Country must complete
> Her glorious destiny. Begin even now,
> Now, when oppression, like the Egyptian plague
> Of darkness, stretched o'er guilty Europe, makes
> The brightness more conspicuous that invests
> The happy Island where ye think and act;
> Now, when destruction is a prime pursuit,
> Show to the wretched nations for what end
> The powers of civil polity were given.

*The Excursion*, then, as a whole, justly disappointed the expectation roused by Wordsworth himself in the Preface, and still more in the magnificent 'Prospectus'. It is not a great poem; it falls not only in weight and unity of poetic substance, but in sustained power of poetic style and structure. But it is a great and significant document

[1] 'O for the coming of that glorious time,' etc. (IX, 293 f.)

of Wordsworth's mind in that transitional phase when, if already hardening towards the dogmatisms of his old age, it could still interpose splendid bursts of imagination among reaches of dignified eloquence, light up bald argument with felicities of phrase, and expound a social philosophy not yet warped by political and theological prejudice.

And outside *The Excursion*, even after its close, these interpositions of noble poetry could still disturb the continuity of decline. One of these produced the 'Laodamia'. Its nominal occasion, a re-reading of Virgil in order to prepare his son for college, hardly suffices to explain a poem which departed so far from the path in poetry which he had made his own. As a boy he had burst into anger when he heard Virgil preferred to Ovid. This, it is true, was before he had read Virgil; but the thrice-distilled poetic diction of Virgil's pastoral lays was almost the antithesis of the speech prescribed for the poet in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. But we know how soon another strain in Wordsworth's genius had begun to assert itself, sometimes in curious dissonance with the first. Milton's magnificent phrasing had evoked the still-sleeping force, and it broke forth at times as in 'The Affliction of Margaret' with an energy disproportioned to the theme. Ten years later, when *The Excursion* was complete, and the eloquence of the Wanderer and the Pastor, always sententious, sometimes majestic, not seldom prosaic, but never idiomatic or homely, had become the settled habit of his speech, the stately style of 'Laodamia' was no longer unnatural or difficult.[1] But, with all its

[1] The poem opens with a Miltonic and quite un-English classicism:

'With sacrifice before the rising morn',

i.e. before the morn rises; for it is 'mid shades of night'. The second stanza might be taken (metre apart) for Pope's *Iliad*.

nobility and beauty, it is touched, as Wordsworth's writing so rarely is, with an air of artifice, almost of a *tour de force*. He is telling a classical story in a style reminiscent now of Milton, now of the once-disdained English Augustans; not, like William Morris in later days, translating it into an idiom entirely his own. Yet Wordsworth is heard throughout, almost as clearly as Keats, through his Miltonic vesture, in 'Hyperion'. The austere beauty of the theme, the submission of passion to the higher wisdom of endurance and self-control, answered to the call of the Stoical or Christian fortitude in which his faith found refuge when the glory of the old rapture grew dim; and Wordsworth finds a noble language of his own to express this call. The Wanderer, checking the poet's outspoken grief after hearing the story of Margaret—

> enough to sorrow you have given,
> The purposes of Wisdom ask no more—

is resumed in Protesilaus's warning to his wife who would be 'a second time his bride':

> Be taught, O faithful consort, to control
> Rebellious passion; for the Gods approve
> The depth, and not the tumult of the soul.
> A fervent, not ungovernable love.

It is interesting that Wordsworth was attracted to the story, as he tells us, by the legend of the two trees by the Hellespont which attested the sympathy of Nature with the lovers by their 'constant interchange of growth and blight'. But this trace of the earlier Wordsworth remains only as a graceful Epilogue.

# IX

## THE AFTERMATH

### I

The almost complete disappearance of what was great and distinctive in the genius of Wordsworth after the date of *The Excursion* is a commonplace of criticism. It suffices to make that larger half of his poems which were written after 1810 almost wholly unread and a full third of them generally unknown even by name. But as to the character and extent of the decline, there is much critical diversity. It is one of the great services rendered by the new edition of *The Prelude*, to have enabled us to define more exactly the changes which Wordsworth's later mind underwent, and to show that they were not in all points for the worse. It has contributed to make more evident that his poetic decay was not a retreat of genius all along the line; that there was partial collapse while the main body stood firm, and stubborn rearguard resistance when the rest was in full rout. The exquisite simplicity, magically won from words on every man's lips, which he first attained in the finer *Lyrical Ballads*, scarcely survived the first Scottish tour. Of the larger harmonies and richer diction of 'Tintern Abbey' and the original *Prelude* he remained master till the date of the great Ode; and it could still at fortunate moments lift the stiff dignity of his normal later style into the grandeur of 'Laodamia' (1814), and

of part of the 'Lines composed on an Evening of Extraordinary Beauty' (1818); while several of the later sonnets, the Duddon 'Afterthought', and the 'King's College Chapel' and 'Mutability' of the despised *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, and the Abbotsford sonnet (1831), fall little short of his finest.

If we look to the substance of this verse we find that its imaginative greatness can hardly be separated from that inspired vision of the world which we call Wordsworthian, and which the newly discovered version of *The Prelude* enables us to appreciate more fully than ever before. In this vision God, Man, and Nature appeared in intimate union. In the verses already quoted from the new material, this intuition of the divine unity at the heart of reality becomes an ecstatic apprehension of 'that interior life

> In which all beings live with God, themselves
> Are God, existing in the mighty whole,
> As indistinguishable as the cloudless east
> Is from the cloudless West, when all
> The hemisphere is one cerulean blue',

while the distinctions which rend that unity apart are scornfully dismissed as creations of that false secondary power, which persuades us that

> our puny boundaries are things
> Which we perceive and not which we have made.

These lines, though never incorporated in any version of *The Prelude*, express with sublime intensity one aspect of the Wordsworthian apprehension, the mystic sense of absolute unity, which probably reflects his pre-occupation with Spinoza. But it was not a characteristic of Wordsworth, even at the height of his genius, to deride the

distinctions within this unity, as merely the 'puny boundaries' forged by our lower reason. He saw the sense world with eyes and ears too keen for that. But he saw it with the added glory of the larger imaginative apprehension. It is the disintegration of this hold both upon the inner unity and upon the imaginative apprehension of the parts, which marks, on the psychological side, Wordsworth's poetic decline.

But the distintegration was not a simple process, neither was the decline. If we look to reach and intensity of poetry, they cannot possibly be said to have proceeded *pari passu*. Full possession, like perfect health, often makes less for poetry than loss and disease. It was precisely his tragic awareness that the things he once saw he now could see no more, that wrung from Wordsworth the sublimest Ode in the language. But it remains true, on the whole, that the decline of that vision impoverished the springs of his poetry.

Man was, and remained, the main haunt and region of his song. But he saw Man now increasingly in the common daylight of political and institutional categories; as a member of States, nations, churches, and political parties. Here we are confronted with the paradox that Wordsworth, the pioneer, as we have seen, of nationalism, had scarcely a glimpse of the poetry of nationhood. Landor alone among his greater contemporaries—poet and republican from boyhood to old age—answered the call of Spain's heroic legend and of her modern struggle for freedom, with equal ardour. Wordsworth's championship of Spain was as unconnected with her poetry as with her religion. It rested at bottom on nothing more political or historic than his elementary reverence for the soul of individual man. A nation was a community of men which

the Schills, Hofers, Toussaints, and Palafoxes died to set free. Even England, for which at moments not rare perhaps, but rarely vocal, he could feel 'as a lover or a child', is yet less a great historic community, than the land in which Shakespeare and Milton had spoken, and which uses their speech. If Wordsworth anticipated Swinburne's passion for the freedom of the nations of Europe, he did not in any degree anticipate his imaginative apprehension of national genius. That Wordsworth's nationalism had thus no root in historic or poetic sympathy, goes far to explain why his interest in Spain apparently ceased with the fall of Napoleon. It does not wholly explain it. For the 'Restoration' of a Spanish monarchy soon gave renewed occasion for heroic struggle to Spanish patriots. When, in 1820, they rose against the restored king, their struggle found an echo in Shelley's 'Ode to Liberty'; but Wordsworth remained inflexibly silent and apparently indifferent. Spain was now in conflict with a tyrant at home, not with a foreign aggressor, and these two varieties of 'the struggle for freedom' stood, for Wordsworth, on wholly different ground. The first wore the halo of heroic struggle for the defence of home and the homeland; the second was biassed by the apprehensions of a repentent revolutionary. The Spaniards of the Peninsular War had resisted Napoleon, those of the new rising were repeating the Revolution which had produced him.

But the silence of the once impassioned seer of the Cintra Tract cannot, unhappily, be wholly explained by the change in the aims or character of these struggles. The attenuation of imaginative vigour which became unmistakable in his work after 1815, told especially upon the large and generous sympathies with the world beyond the

bounds of England, which had stirred him to so many soul-animated strains throughout that earlier struggle. The Italians had been handed over by the Treaty of Vienna to Austria; but the struggle, prolonged through the entire remainder of his life, of the Risorgimento evoked no syllable of encouragement from the poet who, in 1802, had so nobly 'grieved over' the extinction of the greatness of Venice.[1]

Yet it was this struggle of Italy for independence which more than any other drew England into that sympathy with nationalism of which Wordsworth had become the prophetic exponent in the Cintra Tract. The pioneer was silent, apathetic; a growing body of his countrymen unconsciously followed the way he had pointed. The very men in England who were Italy's warmest friends, mostly Whigs and Radicals, regarded Wordsworth with resentment, even bitter animosity. For them, as for Mazzini, the English poet of nationalism was its hero, Byron; the great Tract, if known, was ignored; and Wordsworth, if thought of in this connection at all, was thought of as the Tory renegade, whose sympathies were bound to be with reaction abroad, as they so unmistakably were with reaction at home.

For Wordsworth, however indifferent he may have become to foreign politics, had also become, since the close of the war, extraordinarily active in the politics of his own country. He had opposed the war at

[1] The forecast, in a sonnet of 1837, conceived as he looked forth to the Alban hills, of the future coming of a Third Italy, comes from a philosophic traveller, not a politician. The oppression incident to a foreign rule was probably less during the Austrian occupation of Lombardy and Venetia than had been suffered by Germans and others from French rule under Napoleon. Had Wordsworth lived in our day he would have witnessed an Italian tyranny more oppressive than either, exercised over a quarter of a million of Austrians.

its inception, he had since supported the party which had carried it through, and he now openly identified himself with the Tories. It was at some date after 1820, as will be noticed later, that he rewrote his lines on Burke in *The Prelude*, converting a qualified tribute to the seductive orator into a whole-hearted eulogy of the founder of philosophic conservatism. Wordsworth was one of those who shrink from no apparent inconsistency, confident that they are true to themselves. This he fundamentally was. He never ceased to believe that by the soul only the nations shall be great and free, that, as a modern journalist might phrase it, spiritual values ought to be supreme in national life. This belief, however, could evidently not be exhaustively and exclusively expressed in the terms of any one political creed. It would probably be accepted by high-minded men of all parties, but be interpreted differently by different men, and by the same man in different political circumstances. For Wordsworth, national freedom never ceased to be a condition of the welfare of the national soul, and he never swerved from his allegiance to it. But so did religion; whether, as in his greatest days, it was a religion in which God and Nature and the Soul were felt in mystic harmony or oneness, or the religion of the Anglican Church which became the tenacious and exclusive creed of his later years. In the maintenance of the ascendency of the English Church Wordsworth saw with inflexible conviction, from at least 1815 onwards, the chief condition of the spiritual welfare of England, and he fiercely and blindly resisted whatever, in his view, menaced it. It is hard now to condone his bitter opposition both to Catholic emancipation, to any removal of the disabilities then suffered by all forms of 'Dissent', and to the first Reform Bill. But

it was a reasoned, not an interested opposition; it led to regrettable conclusions because it was based upon narrow premisses; premisses rigidly established in a powerful mind, whose accessibility to new impressions grew daily less. The admission of a mass of new electors to the franchise, and of Catholics to equal rights with Protestants, would endanger the divinely appointed instrument for maintaining the spiritual health of his country. 'The evolution of Wordsworth's opinions', Leslie Stephen, who was far from sharing them, pronounces with perfect justice, 'was both honest and intelligible'. The charge that Wordsworth was in any dishonourable sense a 'renegade' to his earlier faith, powerfully exposed by Dicey, is now out of court; and Browning's 'The Lost Leader', which conveyed that charge in an almost ribald form, and was only half recanted in his riper years, is felt to be unworthy of either of these great poets.

And the superior disdain which even a modern Conservative can hardly suppress for Wordsworth's uncompromising Toryism, must reckon with one remarkable document—the account given by John Stuart Mill, in a letter, of his talks with Wordsworth at Rydal, at the very height of the political crisis. The son of James Mill had been brought up, we know, in the straitest sect of Philosophical Radicalism. His education, directed by his only less able father, the chief, after the Master, of the Benthamite school, had been, in intellectual range, unapproached in his generation. It was at every point remote from Wordsworth's. No less remote were his aims. Trained in the analysis of social, political and economic phenomena he saw with acute understanding the crowded evils under which England laboured. But he

was equally confident that they could be removed by radical legislative reform. He believed in progress as ardently as Godwin; but he saw in government neither, like Godwin, an obstacle to it nor, like the average Tory, a means of safeguarding privilege and property, but the instrument of constructive legislation, directed in particular to effect a more equitable redistribution of both. Since 1829 he had edited the leading organ of the Philosophic Radicals, the *Westminster Review*. But poetry, religion, and nature had remained foreign to his experience. His emotional capacities, where emotion was not built upon reason, had been disciplined into atrophy. A spiritual enlargement derived from culture of feeling had no part in his vision, ardent and assured as it was, of the progress of man. But there were times when a progress founded solely on a rational creed seemed an empty and unsustaining ideal. It was in the dejection caused by this perception that, in the autumn of 1828, he had for the first time read Wordsworth. It was a discovery of the first moment to him, and of hardly less to the student of Wordsworth's mind and influence. 'What made Wordsworth's poems', he tells us, 'a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the influence of beauty. This seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, which . . . had no connection with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. . . . And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence. The delight which these poems gave me proved that with culture of this sort

there was nothing to dread from the most confirmed habit of analysis'.

It was three years after this emancipation, in the autumn of 1831, that Mill, now twenty-six, visited at Grasmere the poet to whom he owed it. Personal intercourse under such circumstances often ends in disillusion. But Mill's expectations, derived only from the poetry, were notably surpassed. He pays tribute to Wordsworth's intellectual mastery in that very region of social and political affairs which was the familiar field of his own trained thought. 'He talks on no subject more instructively than on states of society and forms of government.' He was struck especially, first, by 'the extensive range of his thoughts', and then by 'the extreme comprehensiveness and philosophic spirit which is in him.' He 'seems always to know the pros and cons of every question, and when you think he strikes the balance wrong, it is only because you think he estimates erroneously some matter of fact. Hence all my differences with him, or with any other philosophic Tory, would be differences of matter-of-fact or detail, while my differences with the Radicals and the Utilitarians are differences of principle; for these see generally only one side of the subject, and in order to convince them you must put some entirely new idea into their heads, whereas Wordsworth has all the ideas there already, and you have only to discuss with him the "how much" . . .'

That the philosophic Radical and the poet found common ground, that they could agree in 'principle' while differing in detail, and that this common ground of principle which Mill shared with Wordsworth divided him from his Benthamite associates, throws a significant light upon both. It was, in fact, ground which had first

been opened for Mill by his discovery of Wordsworth's poetry three years before. 'Happiness' continued to be his definition of the final aim of human life, the sufficient formula for both individual and social well-being. But he was no longer content to measure it, with Bentham, in terms of 'pleasure', or to seek its source mainly in a better ordering of outward conditions. He saw that the individual must co-operate in his own 'happiness', and that, not by directly seeking it, but by a culture of all his capacities, by making, in Wordsworth's phrase but with a richer sense than it ordinarily covers, 'his moral being his prime care'. Wordsworth's feudal and archaic conception of society was elementary in comparison with the scientific analysis of its structure which Bentham had taught his disciples. But how the ablest and most open-minded of these disciples had become aware that in this feudal and archaic society, where 'moral culture', however entangled with outworn creeds, was yet in some sort organized; that it often, even, grew like a flower under conditions most offensive to the order-loving economist; as when the Beggar, instead of being driven into the workhouse, 'lived in the eye of Nature', on the compassion his need evoked. Mill probably agreed about the Old Beggar as little as about the Anglican Church; in their creed as in their politics they remained far apart. But in their conception of human well-being they were at one. Mill continued to do honour to Bentham for introducing scientific order into morals and politics, but he recognized that the deeper things of life, and the subtler workings of mind and its environment —to one aspect of which, the creative intercourse of man with Nature, his own eyes had been opened by Wordsworth—were hidden from Bentham's view. Bentham's

knowledge of life was not only wholly empirical, it was, in Mill's incisive phrase, 'the empiricism of one who had little experience'.

The profound and lasting impression thus made upon the mind and upon the whole outlook of John Stuart Mill has to be reckoned with in interpreting the entire later career of Wordsworth, and particularly in judging his 'reactionary' politics. Even the 'Sonnets on the Punishment of Death' (1839), however recalcitrant we may think their subject to the character of the sonnet and even of poetry itself, are inspired (if the word be admissible) by his fundamental concern for the 'soul of nations'. He dismisses with contempt the traditional defence of capital punishment, as an act of vengeance, and the common argument for it, that it deters. It is an instrument of the State in its divinely ordained function of guarding the general mind from debasement by laxity in punishing guilt. And he sets forth impressively the doctrine of the State which underlies all his later political belief.

> What is a State? The wise behold in her
> A creature born of time, that keeps an eye
> Fixed on the statutes of Eternity,
> To which her judgements reverently defer.
> Speaking thro' Law's dispassionate Voice the State
> Endues her conscience with external life
> And being, to preclude or quell the strife
> Of individual will, to elevate
> The grovelling mind, the erring to recall,
> And fortify the moral sense of all.

Wordsworth's ruling conceptions of politics, as of religion, retained their grandeur, under whatever modifications, to the end. Where his later mind failed was (as Mill saw) in logical co-ordination with them of the

concrete details. Capital punishment may be a proper weapon in the hands of a government which seeks merely to preserve order; it is useless or worse to one which attempts to 'elevate the grovelling mind' and 'fortify the moral sense of all.'

With a like lofty but obtuse idealism Wordsworth, a year before, had decried, in another sonnet, the 'Ballot-box' in which the 'Spirit of Reform' was seeking safe shelter for her nefarious schemes; and called on St. George of England to frustrate her demand for a 'Pandorian gift' worse than the Dragon he had once struck down.[1] It was reserved for a statesman whose idealism was as lofty as Wordsworth's, but far more instructed, to place the Ballot Act (in 1872) on the Statute Book. But Gladstone, when Wordsworth wrote, was one of its strongest opponents.

Wordsworth's 'ideal Statesman' of this date (Sonnet: 'Blest statesman', 1838) is not in spirit other than his 'Happy Warrior' of thirty years before. If the sense and faculty for storm and turbulence, the lover-like joy in danger, has faded into a prevailing dread, not for himself but for the State, of sweeping change, he is yet no less than the other (though we hear it in less superb verse) one

> whose Mind's unselfish will
> Leaves him at ease among grand thoughts; whose eye
> Sees that, apart from magnanimity,
> Wisdom exists not.

It is only that 'magnamimity' now comes attended by

> Prudence, disentangling good and ill
> With patient care.

[1] 'Protest against the Ballot' (1838).

Wordsworth gloried no less than his opponents in English freedom, and his conception of freedom was philosophically more profound, if historically less just, than theirs. He dared to flout the vulgar identification of freedom with absence of control by declaring that England is 'free because imbound'. That, though he hardly knew it, was in the spirit of Kant, Hegel, and the contemporary Prussia for whose constitution Richard Cobden, in this very year (1838), declared he would willingly have resigned that of his own country.[1]

And this glimpse of Wordsworth's later mind about freedom may serve to remind us of the qualifications which have to be introduced into our notion of him as a 'reactionary Tory' when we turn from international affairs and internal politics to economic and 'social' matters. 'Reactionary Toryism' may connote very different attributes according as it means a stubborn clinging to existing institutions or a return to the past. In the first sense, the Tory is a true 'conservative', in the second he is a 'reactionary' type of Reformer. In politics and international affairs Wordsworth was fanatically 'conservative'. But in economics he, with Coleridge and even more explicitly Southey, and from the opposite camp William Cobbett, wished to revive the feudal and industrial institutions of the Middle Ages, seeing in them not so much a state of more assured dominance for the upper classes, as a state of higher well-being for the people. It was here the Whig economists, with their principle of *laissez-faire*, which permitted the miseries incident to the industrial revolution, who were the 'conservatives'. 'In this field', as has been recently pointed out by Mr

[1] Morley, *Life of Cobden*, p. 130, quoted by Dicey, *The Statesmanship of Wordsworth*, p. 109 n.

Cobban in his very able book on *Burke and the Revolt against the eighteenth century*, 'the very backward turning mentality and reactionary sentiments of the Lake poets enabled them to reach a position not to be attained by the social conscience for another century. For, looking back on the Middle Ages, the Romantic poets discovered a society based on principles very different from those of their own day, and as they compared what they read about the life of the mediæval community with what they knew of modern social conditions, it seemed to them that something of value had been lost with the disappearance of feudalism.'[1] Some of the ideals of *The Excursion* (such as his hope for the 'glorious time' of universal education), carry us even beyond this. An incident of Wordsworth's old age which has astonished his biographers, as it did his Liberal friends, his sympathy with the extreme left wing of Reform, represented by Chartism, thus becomes perfectly intelligible. 'I have no respect whatever for Whigs', Robinson, in 1848, reports that he had heard Wordsworth say, 'but I have a great deal of the Chartist in me.' And this is borne out by the record of the visit of Thomas Brown, a Chartist newly liberated from prison, to Rydal Mount. He was the author of a poem, 'The Purgatory of Suicides', and his visit was doubtless paid to the poet of *The Excursion*, with its deeply felt picture of the factories, not to the Tory politician. But Wordsworth to his gratified astonishment welcomed the Chartist too. 'You Chartists are right; you have a right to votes, only you take the wrong way to obtain them. You must avoid physical violence'. 'Within four years of his death', comments the Conservative Dicey, 'Wordsworth was no Tory'.

[1] A. Cobban, *Burke and the Revolt against the eighteenth century*. Chap. VII. The Lake Poets and Social Reform, p. 197.

Let us say, rather, that in him, as in Carlyle, Chartism, with all its crudeness and violence, spoke home to that passion for human well-being and for the conditions whatever they are that make for it, which lay deeper in both than the categories of party.

II

Beside the 'State' stood for the later Wordsworth a yet more majestic ally, the Church. In his great days they had neither touched his imagination, nor interested his thought. It was not to the English polity nor to any English institution, but to England herself, the home of the men who spoke Shakespeare's tongue and held Milton's faith, that Wordsworth felt 'as a lover or a child'. And when he upbraided her for her faults, 'altar, sword and pen' even bore the brunt of the charge. But from 1815 the Church of England, like the English State, detached itself with growing definiteness from the body of the nation, and gathered increasing sanctity and reverence in his mind, while the vast bodies of Englishmen who stood outside it lost in his hardening eye the dignity of their English heritage, and became, as 'dissenters' or Roman Catholics, the object of his most regrettable antagonisms. We can trace the movement of his ideas with some distinctness. From about 1808 he and Dorothy began regularly to attend Grasmere Church. Between that date and 1814 he was painting, in the later Books of *The Excursion*, a gracious and beautiful aspect of Anglicanism, the paternal relation of a pastor to his people which Wordsworth saw at Grasmere (the original of his Churchyard among the mountains); this remained both his ideal and the type, as he imagined, of the position of the English clergy at large.

> A genial hearth, a hospitable board
> And a refined rusticity, belong
> To the neat mansion where, his flock among
> The learned Pastor dwells, their watchful Lord.

So he described the 'Pastoral Character' half a dozen years later in the 'Ecclesiastical Sonnets', and it is hardly wrong to say that the entire series is composed from the standpoint of just such a Parsonage, inspired by just such a conception of Pastoral Character, such an idea of the Church. The poet himself writes like a 'learned pastor', recording the significant movements in the history of his Church from a similar standpoint of refined rural detachment; somewhat as he had shortly before chronicled the course of his Lakeland river Duddon from source to mouth. The history of that Church, too, he sees as a 'stream' upon whose bosom the ship of the English people has passed

> Floating secure while nations have effaced
> Nations——

and that majestic security is the spirit of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets. The tranquil Oxfordshire Parsonage in which the one-time comrade of his revolutionary fervour, Robert Jones, had found a congenial retreat, symbolized, on a humbler level, Wordsworth's own retreat from those Uranian heights 'to which the heaven of heavens was but a veil', to the stately decorum of Anglicanism. One of the subtlest of Wordsworth's nineteenth-century interpreters, who was also a devout English Churchman, and the child of an Anglican rectory, F. W. Myers, has paid a tribute to this sequence as 'the authentic exposition of his Church's historic being—an exposition delivered with something of her own unadorned dignity, and in her moderate and tranquil tone'. But he adds the confession

which these adjectives forebode—that the religion which it embodies expresses 'rather the stately tradition of a great Church than the pangs and aspirations of a holy soul. There is little in them . . . of the stuff of which a Paul, a Francis, a Dominic are made. . . . How great the gulf between Wordsworth and George Herbert!' How much greater still the gulf between Wordsworth and the sublime poet who saw the vision of the Catholic Church in the Earthly Paradise, and who portrayed Dominic and Francis with the profound insight of one who had in himself 'the stuff of which they were made'.

To invoke a comparison so overwhelming may seem idle. But it serves to throw into clearer relief the pedestrian method which Wordsworth has chosen for his celebration of the Church. We read its history, in the Comedy, in flaming symbols, in concentrated drama, in the impassioned retrospect of its beatified doctors and saints, in St. Peter's denunciation of the unworthy holders of his keys, in the great vision of the triumphal car in the Earthly Paradise. It is possible to reproduce a historical development in poetry; but then the history must have the unity and concentration of a dramatic action; Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Sonnets are a versified Chronicle. They owe the qualified significance they possess not to grandeur of handling but to the inrush of poetry at occasional detached and isolated moments, like that in which the poet for whom sorrow and solicitude opened ways to infinity found them also in the self-poised branching roof of King's College Chapel,

> where music dwells
> Lingering, and wandering on as loth to die,
> Like thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof
> That they were born for immortality.

Infinity and loneliness; these were thoughts which retained power to invoke sublime flashes of poetry even in the ageing Wordsworth. Sometimes, when they occurred in a context to which he only in later years became sensitive, they evoked, as here, uplifts of imagination which, if we interpret his poetic decline with mechanical rigour, justly surprise us. When he described his Cambridge years in 1804 he tells us in matter-of-fact tones, how as his chaise rolled in over the Huntingdon plain, he

> first saw
> The long-back'd chapel of King's College rear
> His pinnacles above the dusky grove.[1]

In 1839 this became a little less bald if more verbose: he sees

> The long-roofed Chapel of King's College lift
> Turrets and pinnacles in answering files
> Extended high above a dusky grove.

Far more striking is the change introduced at the same time into the description of Newton's statue in the antechapel of Trinity. In 1804 the description is accurate and matter-of-fact:

> The Ante-chapel where the statue stood
> Of Newton, with his Prism and silent face.

To this, as Mr de Selincourt has disclosed, the Wordsworth of sixty-nine made the magical addition already referred to:

> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone.

[1] III, 3 f.

III

In such things the old poet not only recovered at moments his old self; he recovered it at the call of outward impressions to which his imagination in the days of its utmost potency had made slight response. How was it with those impressions which had from childhood been interwoven with the most intimate upreachings of his poetic life? Was Wordsworth in his later years still, in any sense, the poet of Nature? Was the passing of the rapturous vision, which he had made unforgettable in the great Ode, final and absolute? And were those 'compensations' which fill the close of the Ode with a deeper rapture than that which its opening commemorates, compensations for the poet as well as for the man?

To this the answer is fairly simple. Rare moments there were in which Wordsworth seems to have recovered something of the old vision, and yet more of the old ecstasy in the unlooked-for presence of what he had so long forgone. Such a moment he himself hailed in the well-known lines 'Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty' in 1818. He prays, should he swerve from God, to be reminded of

> the light
> Full early lost and fruitlessly deplored,
> Which at this moment on my waking sight
> Appears to shine, by miracle restored;
> My soul, though yet confined to earth,
> Rejoices in a second birth.

But if the 'light' and the rapture have been restored, 'by miracle' or otherwise, the old magic of imaginative speech has surely not answered to the call; and the trappings of pietistic phrase to which he has recourse,

however consolatory to the theologian, only betray the poverty of the poet.

> From worlds not quickened by the sun
> A portion of the gift is won ;
> An intermingling of Heaven's pomp is spread
> On ground which British shepherds tread

is, in thought and style alike, a disastrous descent from

> something far more deeply interfused——

Of such moments we have no further record. But if he ceased to have even the exalted experience which great nature poetry presupposes, if the 'faculty divine' of the nature-poet failed him as the 'Vision' faded, 'nature' continued to the end to yield lively impressions which he turned into fluent and accomplished verse. But it mingles or alternates with other sentiments. The rapt poet is seen as the cultured man, with literary and historical interests, considerable power of reflection, to all of which he extends the facile hospitality of his verse. One of the finest of the later sonnets—

> Most sweet it is with unuplifted eyes,

betrays with all its charm the less intense reaction of his senses to beauty. He walks through 'a fair region', now looking up, now forbearing, for the sake of some ideal scene, or some note of meditation

> slipping in between
> The beauty coming and the beauty gone.

A meditative walk has never been more subtly described. Yet it is not pedantic to find in it the sign of a mind for which Nature has come to provide delightful interludes rather than transforming experience.

This description is not untrue to the most sustained 'Nature-poem' of his later life, the Duddon sonnets.

The series of sonnets on 'The River Duddon' (1820) purport to have been evoked as the poet followed the river's course from source to mouth, and the groundwork of each sonnet is always the local character of the scene which suggested it. But even to an ardent lover of rivers such a sequence cannot have the lyric stuff of human passion; and to Wordsworth Duddon was not endeared either, like Derwent, 'fairest of all rivers', by the memories of his marvellous childhood, or like Rotha, by familiar neighbourhood in later days. He has told us, too, with his disarming candour, that the sonnets were written after visits, on separate occasions, to particular spots, not continuously after an actual wandering along the 'trotting burn's meander'; and this origin is borne out by the desultory and incidental effect of the whole. He remembers how as a child he had pursued streams such as this through tangled woods or up to their pure mountain springs; but these memories are no longer recreative 'spots of time', hiding places of the man's power; the man contemplated them, and reflected about them, but the 'power' was gone. In 1806 he had first addressed the Duddon in a sonnet—as 'a mountain stream', impelled to desert the haunts of men and cleave a passage through the wilderness

> Attended but by thy own voice, save when
> The clouds and fowls of the air thy way pursue!

Duddon was for the poet of solitude the wild and tameless stream, on whose banks even the shepherd's cot was an intrusion. In 1819 both mood and phrase are changed. Duddon is still a lonely stream, and the poet a solitary

listener to its voice, but he can now turn from its 'unfruitful solitudes' to dwell with evident satisfaction on the cottage planted among them, and on the ruddy children 'by the mother's eye carelessly watched', who sport beside it. Duddon's chronicler now lingers over the human and historic associations of his lonely stream. The 'stepping-stones' remind him of a jewelled belt, and he draws two charming vignettes of scenes at the crossing when 'the high-swollen flood' puts the child's or the shepherd-girl's courage to the proof. At the 'faery chasm' he pauses to tell the legend of children stolen; at a deep pool, over which grew a specimen of 'that Rose which from the prime derives its name' (alas for the plainness of Peter Bell!), he recounts the tradition of a love-lorn Maid who was drowned in trying to reach it. His eye lingers on a ruined keep, once possessed by 'the gay, the bountiful, the bold', and fastens fondly on the venerable houses of religion on the banks, Seathwaite Chapel and the Kirk of Ulpha. And when Duddon at length expands into an estuary, he tells us with an air of pride that this wild lonely mountain stream is now

> In stately mien to sovereign Thames allied
> Spreading his bosom under Kentish downs,
> With commerce freighted, or triumphant war!

But this banality and all the miscellaneous accomplishment of these thirty-three sonnets are immediately forgotten in the 'Afterthought', one of the greatest of all Wordsworth's sonnets. For here geography and history, time and space, are transcended; the river, which seems to flow out and lose itself in the sea, is in reality eternal, and a symbol of the eternity which man, born to vanish in the

silent grave, may also win if the labour of his hands have served the future hour,

> And if . . .
> Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower
> We feel that we are greater than we know.

In the summer of 1820 Wordsworth, with his wife and sister and his good friend Crabb Robinson, made a Continental tour—save for the visit to Calais in 1802 the first since his residence in France. He no longer travelled in the hardy fashion of that July in 1790 when he and Jones from Calais southward 'went pacing side by side'; nor yet in the rude equipage which shocked the fastidious Rogers on the first Scottish tour. But the athletic walker in him was only half reconciled to the carriage-travelling which, like the railway and the steamer a little later, he perforce accepted. At times he would explain his acquiescence. 'Yet why repine?' he asked in a sonnet composed 'in a carriage on the Banks of the Rhine'. But he did not escape embarrassing dilemmas. An hotel discussion in which he denounced carriages was once awkwardly interrupted by the arrival of his own. Even in the verse memorials of the tour we sometimes hear the voice of the well-to-do English gentleman across that of the democrat and nationalist. His impatience with the strains of

> abject Want
> Or Idleness in tatters mendicant

which fettered the freedom of his fancy at the Staubbach, gravely impairs for us the beauty of his greeting to 'this bold, this bright, this skyborn Waterfall'.

And it was an amusingly un-Wordsworthian Words-

worth who painted the Calais fish-wives whom he encountered on landing—

> Withered, grotesque, immeasurably old
> And shrill and fierce in accent;

playfully recalling that the Nereids—their submarine counterparts—were of peerless and undecaying beauty. The contrast is deftly turned. The fading of the inspired poet has left only the sparkle of the accomplished scholar. The Pagan myth-world whose loveliness he had passionately longed to restore to a selfish and corrupt Christendom, he can now use, half jestingly, as a not ungraceful toy.

But presently, in the Schwyz and Uri land, the poet of the Liberty Sonnets recovers a gleam of his old fire. A kinship deeper than politics bound him to that other mountain land, whose 'voice', with England's, was the chosen music of Liberty, and whose annexation in Liberty's name had at a stroke destroyed his faith in the young Republic. He visited with emotion the burial place of Reding, the captain-general of the Swiss army of defence; and as he passed the wayside chapels and crosses of these 'Catholic cantons', the robust Protestant in him uttered a prayer for 'Charity'

> to bid us think
> And feel, if we would know.

The decade following the Ecclesiastical and Duddon sonnets and the Continental Tour of 1820 was relatively barren both of event and of poetry. The six-weeks' tour on the Rhine with Coleridge in 1828 left scarcely a trace. But the ensuing decade (1830–40) saw a recrudescence of activity, and a few moments commemorated in enduring

verse. He renewed and extended the travels of his youth. Two tours in Scotland (1831, 1833) were followed in 1837 by a tour in Italy, when he saw for the first time Florence and Rome. The 'Memorials' of these tours are rich in personal interest. He was entering on his long and mellow old age, almost untouched by physical decay, and intellectually perhaps more mobile than ever within the narrowing limits imposed by feebler perceptions and a harder creed. The nature-poet is now sometimes obscured, sometimes reinforced, by old memories. He 'revisits' Yarrow, which he had in 1803 refused to visit; Scott, whom he had then first met, is now his companion; and it is Scott's Yarrow, and the glory shed upon it by this 'last minstrel', which gives charm to verse in which the garment of the old ballad stanza is somewhat awkwardly worn. But in his tried medium, the sonnet, the memory of Scott and of Scott's home under Eildon's triple height lifts him to one of the lesser summits of his poetry. The mountain glory is now charged with sorrow:

> A trouble not of clouds, or weeping rain,
> Nor of the setting sun's pathetic light,
> Hangs over Eildon. . . .
> Spirits of Power, assembled there complain
> For kindred Power, departing from their sight;
> While Tweed, best pleased in chanting a blithe strain,
> Saddens his voice again and yet again.

The recent farewell to Scott vibrates too in the equally noble Trossachs sonnet. A mile or two beyond that 'solemn pass', by Loch Katrine side, he and Dorothy in 1803 had had that evening greeting from 'two well-dressed women'—'What, are Ye stepping Westward?' which transformed that sunset walk into a pilgrimage to

a world without place or bound. The sublimity of the lonely and the infinite is no longer within his reach; he has fallen back upon the beautiful but no longer individual symbolism which he now shares with the Christian Church:

> There's not a nook within this solemn Pass
> But were an apt confessional for One
> Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone,
> That Life is but a tale of morning grass
> Withered at eve.

It is these ecclesiastical and biblical symbolisms that 'Nature's old felicities' now most immediately and forcibly invoke in him.

The remainder of this autumn tour was largely spoilt by rain, though the poet, not to be so balked, made sonnets vigorously as he paced Roslyn Chapel while the storm raged hour after hour without. In the summer of 1833 he returned with his son and Crabb Robinson, expressly to see Staffa, Iona and other famed spots of the Western Highlands, perforce omitted before; and the sonnets duly conceived and composed there, or in the 'tranquillity' of home after his return, become more and more what he modestly enough calls them—

> memorial rhymes that animate my way,

not the record of great moments caught on the wing.

The Continental tour of 1837 made him acquainted with some famous scenes not visited on the tour of 1820, or earlier, and exhibit the tenacity of the subdued but by no means despicable poetic power which he still possessed. It is hard to see any prevailing difference in technical virtuosity between the earlier and the later 'Memorials', —seventeen years apart. But it is hard, too, to mistake

the symptoms of mental ossification in a great poet who, on his first sight of Rome, found verse for little more than the disappointing slightness of the Tarpeian rock, the pine planted by Sir George Beaumont on Monte Mario, and the raucous cry of the bird that had once warned the founder of the papal chair ' and yon resplendent Church '. That he should betray no consciousness of the splendours of recent English poetry which Rome had inspired or witnessed it would be idle to complain; *Childe Harold* he disdained; *Prometheus Unbound* he may not even have heard of. But he dwells tenderly on the visit, six years before, of the dying Scott; and even undertakes a pilgrimage of his own to the remote Apennine town of Savona, once the home of the seventeenth-century poet Chiabrera, whose Elegies he had translated in 1810 for Coleridge's *The Friend.*

> On the brink
> Of that high, convent-crested cliff I stood,
> Modest Savona ! over all did brood
> A pure poetic Spirit—as the breeze
> Mild—as the Verdure, fresh—the sunshine, bright
> Thy gentle Chiabrera !

Of all the romantic spots that lure the passing traveller where the Western Apennines plunge into the Tyrhenian Sea, ' the desolated convent on the cliff of Savona ', he later told Miss Fenwick, ' struck my fancy most '; nay more—' had I for the sake of my own health . . . or any other cause, been desirous of a residence abroad, I should have let my thoughts loose upon a scheme of turning some part of this building into a habitation, provided, as far as might be, with English comforts '.

So, for a moment, the ' paradise of exiles ' could overcome the deep-seated insularity of Wordsworth, and but

for his tenacious good health, and the very precarious prospect of 'English comforts' there, the poet of Rydal might have involuntarily found a last haven, like Shelley, in a Casa Magna by the Western Sea.

IV

If Wordsworth's poetry of Nature became after 1815 the brief glory, at most, of rare moment, if the prophet of Man survived only in the tenacity of a Tory dogmatist, the inner decay of his genius was very little betrayed in his intercourse with the world. On the contrary, the tenacious vigour of his constitution seemed to give a renewed vitality to the mortal part of him, and the recluse of Rydal became a figure in London society, an autocrat of literary breakfast-tables and, by the evidence of more than one witness of weight, one of the first talkers of his time. With unexpected facility the man of rigid habitudes adapted himself to the claims of the position of a well-to-do poet of acknowledged status and fame. This position grew daily more securely his. The relative failure of *The Excursion*, and the critical storm that followed, had not seriously checked the steady growth of the limited but choice audience which found in his poetry a unique appeal. *The Excursion*, too, had been accompanied by the 'Fragment from the Recluse', and followed (1817) by Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*,—the one the sumblimest utterance of Wordsworth's aims in poetry, the other the most penetrating critical exposition of it.

Wordsworth, it is true, was not richly endowed in the gifts which make either for intimate friendship with a few or for genial expansiveness in a wider circle. Even with Coleridge, the spiritual brotherhood which

lifted each to his highest access of power is most distinctly and adequately expressed in the rapturous homage of the lesser poet. Wordsworth's noble and beautiful tribute to Coleridge at the close of *The Prelude* is far (in the original version) from conveying his intellectual debt. The yet greater service performed by Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria* was even less worthily acknowledged. Schiller's not less penetrating analysis of the mind and poetry of Goethe, in 1794, was the beginning of his friendship with the greater poet; Coleridge's diagnosis left a coolness behind which was never wholly overcome. After years of rare intercourse, however, the two poets undertook, in 1828, that six-weeks' tour up the Rhine of which, as already noticed, so few poetic memorials remain. Thirty momentous years had passed since the two as young men had first set foot on German soil. They had then talked with the ageing Klopstock at Hamburg; now they were themselves of repute in Germany, though still but as lesser lights of the firmament illuminated by Byron and Scott. Even so, we are told, the report that they were at Bonn brought men so eminent as A. W. Schlegel and Niebuhr, professors at the university, to visit them. The young Englishman, J. C. Young, who was present, has preserved some traits of interest.[1] Wordsworth entered from a walk, 'his cheeks glowing with the effects of recent exercise', and a sprig of apple-blossom overgrown with lichen in his hand. In the talk Coleridge took as usual the lead, meeting their well-meant praise of Scott and Byron (if we may trust Young) by decrying both, and the assurance that the silent poet at his side was one of the enduring luminaries of English poetry, Bryon a meteor which rose only to blaze and die.

[1] *Memoir of J. C. Young*, 1871; quoted by Harper, ii, 348.

We would gladly have heard more of this first meeting of Coleridge with Schlegel, whose Shakespeare lectures, twenty years before, had so fruitfully concurred with his own. A more distinguished witness, the Irish traveller, T. C. Grattan, who spent three days in the company of the two poets and Robinson, on the same tour, emphasizes the rough and harsh aspect of Wordsworth, 'more like a Northern farmer than a Lake poet',—'the very antithesis of Coleridge', under the spell of whose eloquence and engaging benignity he palpably fell. But his account of Wordsworth adds fresh illustrations of the keen eye for material facts and the punctilious accuracy in describing them, which impressed, amused, or bored the hearers of the later Wordsworth's talk. The marked 'particularity' of 'The Thorn' or 'The Highland Boy' was still vigorous in the observer who counted the arches of the bridge at Namur 'with the accuracy and hardness of a stone-cutter'.

Cultivated men of the world who thus casually encountered Wordsworth in these years commonly paid but a grudging tribute to his social powers. Touches are frequent which forestall Matthew Arnold's cavalier assertion, over dinner at the Athenæum, to John Morley, 'he was a boor'. The courtly Sir Henry Taylor, himself the owner of the most Olympian head of his generation, found more power than refinement in Wordsworth's face, and would not have judged him from it to be a poet. 'It was a rough grey face', he vividly adds, 'full of rifts and clefts and fissures, and on which, someone said, you might expect lichens to grow.' Wordsworth's rugged strength did not easily take the ply of urban courtesy. But town society found piquancy in this stubborn simplicity, this inborn plainness of mind, which allowed him to be

loquacious, even eloquent, in the assertion of his opinions, but was incapable of insincerity or affectation; and the old poet, with his austere presence, his 'unpoetic' countenance and his Northern burr, was welcomed in circles which had little understanding of his poetry. 'The Wordsworths are quite in request . . . their society is much courted', wrote Mrs. Coleridge already in 1819 to Poole. It was by Francis Jeffrey's own wish that the critic who had dismissed *The Excursion* with his famous 'this will never do' was, in 1831, introduced to the author; and lofty self-consciousness had probably more share than breeding or magnanimity in the 'perfection' with which Wordsworth, Lockhart tells us, 'played the part of the man of the world', apparently 'unconscious that anything had taken place between them before.'

Wordsworth's talk had the qualities and defects of those whose faith in themselves and their significance is of adamantine security. It was, too, by many testimonies most remarkable, as well as most copious and unrestrained, when he was expounding his own ideas. But some of those who have recorded the keenest delight in his conversation admired it across a gulf of intellectual divergence. Crabb Robinson himself, his devoted friend and fellow-traveller, host and guest, who read his poetry with almost purblind devotion, dissented profoundly from his politics and deplored the stubborn silence of the quondam poet of national liberty. One of the best friends of his later years, Arnold of Rugby, a keen Reformer, bought Fox Howe for the sake of his company. And the most remarkable of all the records we possess of Wordsworth's conversation in his later years is that, already noticed in another connexion, which we owe to John Stuart Mill.

Mill, at twenty-six, had to the full the critical alertness, and more than the maturity, of his age; he had grown up in an atmosphere of debate, and had heard some of the best talkers of his time. He knew what he was saying when, in his letter to Sterling afterwards, he put Wordsworth at their head.

He knew, too, what he was saying, when he ascribed to Wordsworth, the embittered Wordsworth of 1831, 'comprehensiveness of mind'. But the combination of comprehensiveness of mind with definite, even narrow, specific opinions could not be described with more precision than in Mill's following statement already quoted, that Wordsworth seemed 'to know the pros and cons of every question, and when you think he strikes the balance wrong, it is only because you think he estimates wrongly some matter of fact'.

Across a gulf of divergence less profound indeed, for both had been mystic poets in their youth, he was watched and listened to, a few years later, by Carlyle. Not in the confidential privacy of Rydal, but at Sir Henry Taylor's breakfast table in London, the most incisive observer of his time took the mental notes which became the famous portrait of the 'Reminiscences': 'He talked well in his way; with veracity, easy brevity, and force; as a wise tradesman would of his tools and workshop, as no unwise one could . . . a fine, wholesome rusticity, fresh as his mountain breezes, sat well on the stalwart veteran, and on all he said and did. You would have said he was a usually tactiturn man, glad to unlock himself, to audience sympathetic and intelligent, when such offered itself. His face bore marks of much, not always peaceful meditation; the look of it not bland or benevolent, so much as close, impregnable and hard; a man *multa*

*tacere loquive paratus*, in a world where he had experienced no lack of contradiction, as he strode along.'

The final decades of Wordsworth's life, in spite of such occasions, steadily diminished his points of contact with the generation in which Mill and Carlyle were now the most commanding figures. His intercourse with society became less intimate as it grew more varied and frequent. And with the early thirties most of his literary contemporaries, including the two or three with whom he had had the utmost degree of intimacy which it was in his nature to enjoy, had passed away. The 'Effusion on the Death of James Hogg' (1834), composed 'extempore' after receiving the news, approached nearer than anything else he has left to the cry of one bereaved for 'precious friends' who have gone. Hogg had not stood very near him, but his death, following those of Scott, Lamb, and Coleridge, inspired a requiem at moments sublime as well as pathetic:

> As clouds that rake the mountain summits,
> Or waves that own no curbing hand,
> How fast has brother followed brother
> From sunshine to the sunless land.

V

They passed, but for half a generation more the veteran poet lived on. Of the rather copious occasional verse of these years but little will survive. But in his desk lay the yellowing leaves of what may prove to be the most enduring monument of his genius; no requiem, but 'an Orphic song to its own music chanted', and steeped from first to last in the morning light of undimmed faith and hope.

The original *Prelude*, begun in 1798, and mainly the

work of 1804–5, has been spoken of in dealing with those years. Unhappily for the understanding of his mind, it remained in its integrity, unpublished, not merely until his death, but until its issue, seventy-six years later, by the editorial labour and scholarship of Mr de Selincourt. Many changes in detail had been made in subsequent years. But until 1839 the poem remained substantially as he had left it then, and as Coleridge had heard it. But it is clear that he had come to view it, both as a record of his opinions and as a work of poetic art, with growing dissatisfaction, and in the spring of that year he took the serious and, for himself as for two generations of English students of his poetry, unhappy step of submitting it to a complete revision. On March 28th of that year Miss Fenwick wrote to Sir Henry Taylor, that 'the beloved old poet' had been 'labouring for the last month, seldom less than six or seven hours a day, or rather one ought to say the whole day, for it seemed always in his mind', at 'the revising of his grand autobiographical poem'. There was still no question of publication before his death. But he was about to enter his seventieth year, and with every year it became more hazardous to defer a revision of which, as he receded from his earlier self, the need appeared ever more urgent. Unfortunately the hazard did not lie only in the increasing imminence of death. Revision, after fifty, of poetry composed in the golden years between twenty-five and thirty-five, is always hazardous. In a more pregnant sense than the words usually carry, Wordsworth's mind was changed. Whether his later creed, in religion and in politics, whether his later style and manner, were better or worse, than his earlier, is so far immaterial; an attempt to 'correct' it into conformity with them was bound to impair the organic unity of the poem, if it did

not destroy it, as a poem, altogether. Admitting, if we will, that Wordsworth's Tory and ecclesiastical faith was as susceptible of poetry as the faith of his golden years, there would still have been a yawning hiatus between this poetry and the story of his youth, of which that earlier faith was precisely the climax and culmination. And then any such poetry was no longer within Wordsworth's reach. The attempt to translate the convictions of 1805 into those of 1839 was thus doubly disastrous.

Was the revision then entirely futile? By no means. Two assets for poetry remained to Wordsworth even in his sixties; neither of them, however, exercised with the security of complete power. He could within certain limits 'correct' his work; he could make it, as writing, more uniformly 'good'. He has less sense of poetry but, on a lower level, a surer instinct for 'style'. He could prune the conversational familiarities, 'I mean', 'we might say', and other clumsy simulations of 'the language really spoken by men', which had occurred the more naturally in the original *Prelude* as it was actually addressed to an intimate friend. He could brace languid constructions, and make loose-jointed sentences compact. He sometimes succeeded in making more vivid for common eyes the naked simplicity which his mystic vision had once glorified, but which he now, like the mass of other people, felt bald. But the distinction between the simplicity which is noble and poetic and the simplicity which is bald and mean had in Wordsworth's best days often eluded him; and the critical instinct which was now more alive to real baldness than of old, missed also more easily the rarer beauty of the unadorned, and put in its place something at the best of a less rare and original felicity. The new phrase is usually more ornate, or more sonorous,

or both. It is not possible here to give more than an example or two of the typical changes. Thus, telling how his imagination in boyhood was haunted on his walks by the tales of the mountain land, he wrote, in 1805, of

> tales . . . which in my walks
> I carried with me among crags and woods
> And mountains. viii, 215 f.

This became, in 1839,

> tales . . . of which the rocks
> Immutable and overflowing streams,
> Where'er I roamed, were speaking monuments.
> viii, 168 f.

But the fountain of poetry was not wholly run dry. Among Mr de Selincourt's happiest finds are the occasional additions, at points, where the flagging and failing imagination, at the spur of some still vivid recollection suddenly evoked by his own narrative, has found a phrase which glorifies the whole context. Such are the two lines on Newton's monument, perhaps the most famous in the whole Prelude; such the line (only fumbled after in earlier versions) which crowns the description of the October hills of Lakeland, as he left them after his first vacation:

> the coves and heights
> Clothed in the sunshine of the withering fern. vi, 11.

But these fine moments were extremely rare. It remains, however, that, stylistically, the revision was by no means wholly for the worse. The poet was putting his work into full dress, for the public eye, and some of the slovenliness as well as much of the easy charm of familiarity disappeared. It was part of this process to

cancel both many proper names, and many intimate details, the loss of which is regrettable to the biographer but hardly to the critic.

A far graver result was the attempt to make the opinions, political, philosophical, theological, expressed in the poem tally with those he now held, and wished to have associated with his name. There was nothing dishonest or disingenuous in this. He was bound by no canon of honour to admit the public to the privacy of his workshop, and offer for its inspection uncorrected 'states' either of his written texts or of his own mind. But on purely literary grounds the attempt now made, by the stiffening hand of an old man, to alter the entire perspective of the picture drawn with the fullness of power was hazardous in the extreme. Yet this was in effect what Wordsworth attempted. He was trying to repaint a picture drawn from one view-point so that it would look as if drawn from another. The result was, if not confusion, a loss of intellectual coherence, often betrayed by the awkward attempts to conceal it, which was responsible for much misunderstanding of the poem, and of the poet's whole position.

In politics, Wordsworth had moved far from his standpoint in 1805. He had even then, as we know, long ceased to be the ardent republican of twelve years earlier; and his whole heart was in the war with France, whose victories in 1793 he had hailed with joy. But this apparent change of front meant no slackening of his inborn passion for liberty, on the contrary it was rooted in the French violation of that cause. He could, therefore, in 1805 still describe with something of complacency his imperviousness to the enchantment of Burke's oratory—'words following words', till the strain, however transcendent, grew 'tedious in a young man's ear'. And he could

inveigh, as we saw, with a passionate scorn nowhere paralleled in his writings, against the Ministry which had persecuted the English partisans of the Revolution—who

> in their weapons and their warfare base
> As vermin working out of reach, . . . leagu'd
> Their strength perfidiously, to undermine
> Justice, and make an end of Liberty. x, 644 f.

Even in 1839 he tempered this indictment, only by the tame device of saying that the Ministers acted as if they had aimed to misuse their strength in this way (71 f.). But the tribute which he now (or somewhat earlier) introduced to Burke was much more than an apology for the sarcasms of the earlier version; it was a fervent endorsement of the principles of Burke's political philosophy—'the majesty of Institutes and Laws hallowed by time', the 'vital power of social ties Endeared by Custom', the disdain for 'upstart theory', the insistence upon 'the allegiance to which men are born'.

But the political aspect of *The Prelude*, consistent or conflicting, is of less importance than its bearing upon the real theme and inspiration of the poem, the growth of his imaginative power, and imaginative apprehension of the world. That his hold upon this master-faculty had become less sure and intimate is betrayed by the phrasing of the crucial passage of the last book where, in the revised version, he declares that imagination has been 'the feeding source of our long labour' (xiv, 193). In the original version it has been 'the moving soul'. A cooler analysis has intervened. Imagination and soul, poetic creation and spiritual life, in the poet, are now in a great degree severed, whereas in 1805 they had been virtually identified. Man, Nature, God, had then been to his visionary eye, so

intimately at one that in exalted hours, reflected in the lines already quoted, he saw all distinctions between them as 'petty boundaries' forged by the mechanical lower reason. This, or a near approach to it, was the spiritual climax to which the entire story of the original Prelude led up, the Pisgah height from which he looked back upon and judged his past. He now, by a number of small changes, seeks to obliterate the traces of that early faith, and to graft upon the narrator the Anglican faith which had displaced it in his mind. The image is not unjust. It would have been possible to present the Anglican faith in a form far more consonant, if not continuous, with his own earlier faith by emphasizing that side of it which derived from Plato and St. Paul. But he chose, as if unworthily concerned to leave no doubt of his orthodoxy, to accentuate those Protestant and ecclesiastical elements which were in most glaring discord with it, and which he had once dismissed as symbols of the superstitions he meant to override. Thus in the great passage on Love (XIII, 143 f.)—the love which grows 'in presence of sublime and lovely forms', the love by which 'all grandeur comes, all truth and beauty', this love, he tells us, in comparison with the simple love of parent and child proceeds 'more from the brooding Soul, and is divine'. This love, which is divine, springs from the soul, which participates in that divineness, in that 'Something interfused through all things'. The pantheism of 'Tintern Abbey' is only obscurely hinted in these lines; but Wordsworth will not have it, and replaces this shadowy suggestion by half a dozen lines of quite explicit doctrine. That simple human love must be 'hallowed' by

> Love that adores, but on the knees of prayer,
> By heaven inspired.

The soul, no longer a source or dwelling of this higher love, is a captive in the bonds of sin, whom only Love can release, and this only when

> Lifted, in union with the purest, best,
> Of earth-born passions, on the wings of praise,
> Bearing a tribute to the Almighty's Throne.
>
> xiv, 184 f.

Or he adds an image which, noble and striking in itself, is yet foreign to the atmosphere; as when in one of the grandest passages he compares the man of imaginative vision, arrested by some kindred splendour of Nature, to

> angels stopped upon the wing by sound
> Of harmony from Heaven's remotest spheres.
>
> xiv, 98.

But this alien image was itself provoked by a felicitous heightening both of thought and rhythm in the same context. These men can, he has said (in 1805), create a like existence,

> and, whene'er it dawns
> Created for them, catch it by an instinct.

This now becomes

> and, whene'er it dawns
> Created for them, catch it, or are caught
> By its inevitable mastery.

The poem which, under the name (given by Mrs Wordsworth) of *The Prelude*, ten years later saw the light was still, fundamentally, the great and unique poem of his prime. It had received the definite impress of his ageing mind, often, and in some points gravely, to its hurt. But it was the ageing mind of a great poet, whose

imagination could at moments still take fire, and who, in some degree, retained the sense of style when imagination was no longer at command.

It was in effect his last work. The closing decade brought official recognition—the laureateship vacant by the death of Southey, and a shattering private grief, the death of Dora. On 23rd April, 1850, he passed away.

VI

Wordsworth's claim to a place among the greatest of English poets—as many think, the third place—cannot be stated simply, or in a sentence. No poet, Bradley has affirmed, was ever more original, and originality is an element in all greatness; but Wordsworth had some of his greatest inspirations when he was walking in the beaten highway of English poetry, and using its traditional resources. How manifold are the kinds of poetry in which Wordsworth has left enduring and memorable work, Bradley showed once for all in that fine Oxford Lecture which remains, for many, the most adequate account of Wordsworth achievement yet given. From the first, Wordsworth's audience has been found among different types of recipient mind, who relished different aspects of him, and often did not agree with or understand one another. His own evolution, though gradual and without violent rupture, increased the divisions. Many readers who found only *simplesse* in the simplicity of 'We are Seven' were stirred, like Landor, as by a trumpet, by the Toussaint Sonnet; and to this day the War sonnets have a surer hold upon the majority of readers than most of the *Lyrical Ballads*. For F. W. H. Myers and the great body of 'Victorian' 'Wordsworthians' he was the poet of

'Tintern Abbey', the founder of a 'Natural Religion'. A. W. Dicey, in 1916, drew into a light heightened by the sinister glare of the Great War, the poet of the Liberty sonnets and the Cintra Tract, the founder of the religion of Nationalism, the Mazzinist twenty years before Mazzini. The transition was prepared for, and in some degree assisted, by W. Raleigh's *Wordsworth* in 1903, and Bradley's Oxford Lecture in the same year.

That the Wordsworth of 'Tintern Abbey' and the Wordsworth of the Cintra Tract are alike and equally the essential Wordsworth no one now will doubt. Both were prophesied in the child whose first 'intercourse with Nature' was the fearless daring of the climber and the rider, who loved 'the beauty that had terror in it', and saw

> the universal earth
> With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
> Work like a sea.

At no time is there a sharp cleavage between his poetry of Nature and his poetry of Man. Through Man and Nature alike rolls the divine 'something' more deeply interfused, and his apprehension of both is inspired and coloured only by the same instincts and appetencies, so that Wordsworthian Nature and Wordsworthian Man appear profoundly akin: 'Characters' of the same great 'Apocalypse' in a different context. His human figures are rarely of significant beauty, save that which belongs to figures like the Solitary Reaper or the Leech-gatherer, touched with the loneliness and the mystery of Nature, or fraught, like the old Cumberland Beggar, with the silent repose of her decay. Lucy Gray, 'the Solitary Child', and that 'single tree' of the great Ode, which so enraptured Blake, were alike avenues to infinity. Stoic

endurance, in the human world, had the same mystic power, it allied man to the undeviating uniformities of natural law; 'Duty', even before he had submitted himself to her control, he had never regarded with the antinomian eyes of Shelley; to keep the law, to move inflexibly in the prescribed orbit, like the most ancient heavens, exhaustively expressed its range. To be 'one with Nature' then meant, quite logically, for Wordsworth, not as with Shelley, to have a living part in her songs and springs, but to be

> Rolled round in Earth's diurnal course
> With rocks and stones and trees,

a portion of her silent undeviating endurance.

It is true, of course, that there were phases in the best of Wordsworth's genius even during the years when it was at its height. He himself distinguished in his adolescence the time, up to 1792, when 'Nature' was supreme in his interest, from the following years of political preoccupation, when 'Man' stood first. Godwin's London made 'Man' the idol of a doctrinaire, and 'Nature' a remembered dream. Dorothy and Coleridge restored the poet of Nature, and of Man living among and sharing the simplicities of Nature, but not the poet of Man defending Liberty against other men. Nether Stowey was no idyl of a recluse, barred against the noise and danger of public affairs. Coleridge, in February, 1798, denounced France in stormy rhetoric; Wordsworth himself was stirred to the depths by the annexation, in the following summer, of Switzerland; but his anger was not yet vocal. It was a visit to the Wye valley, and the memory of an old Beggar who had 'lived and died in the eye of Nature', that unlocked the fountains of memorable song. His

fellowship with Coleridge bore immediate fruit in the *Lyrical Ballads* and 'Peter Bell'. At Goslar Wordsworth's thoughts reverted not to the war with Napoleon but to Lucy at her wheel. And for two years after the settlement at Grasmere we have to do only with the Recluse poetry of a Recluse poet. At length, in the summer of 1802 three almost simultaneous events wakened the silent chords; and from September, 1802, to 1808, Wordsworth's 'two voices, each a mighty voice' continued to utter things which even the changed England of our time is less than ever willing to let die. 'Stepping Westward' and 'The Solitary Reaper' immediately preluded the great sonnets of the impending invasion; the Immortality Ode and the later War sonnets were concurrent with the original 'Prelude' and the 'Ode to Duty'; the Cintra Tract with the scattered splendours of *The Excursion*. Wordsworth was conscious of no violent transition, of no break with himself, in passing from the one region of his poetry to the other. Nor was there. For that 'by the soul only the Nations shall be great and free' was always the ultimate foundation of his politics; and freedom was the elementary condition of the 'joy in widest commonalty spread' through the benign companionship of Nature, in which alone the soul could fulfil itself. In the great Toussaint sonnet—in some sort the very corner-stone of his poetry—Nature makes the cause of freedom her own.

> There's not a breathing of the common wind
> That will forget thee.

Her impersonal forces take part as 'great allies', with heroic and suffering humanity, with

> exultations, agonies
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

The mind of Man was the 'haunt and the main region of his song'. Whether he sang of Man in heroic conflict or in rapturous communion, wedding his soul with Death, or with beauty, that is true. He has written some of the greatest poetry of Man and some of the greatest poetry of Nature. In both his range relatively to the compass of his work is narrow. He is the poet of man, alone, facing the sublimities or the simplicities of Nature, or of men and women who are a portion of these simplicities. Man in society, in cities, and the State, he knows as a politician, and as a politician knows them; as a poet he does not know them. He takes us once to the gates of a factory, he describes London with the eyes of a friendless countryman; but to tell of the 'sorrow barricadoed within the walls of cities' remained the unfulfilled program of a recluse; nor did the friend of Charles Lamb give any sign in verse of knowing that those barricading stone walls could make a 'hermitage' for joy as well. He is one of the greatest poets of oppressed nationality, even the first to proclaim clearly the gospel of nationalism. But his nationalism was almost untouched by history, it was kindled by the heroic champion of a people, not by the human richness of an organized society.

And if he is one of the supreme poets, in some sense the supreme poet, of Nature, of Nature 'wedded' to the mind of Man, here, too, his range is narrow. Sensitive as he was to many aspects of landscape, especially among the mountains, we do not go to him for descriptions of 'scenery'. Closely and delicately as he observed, with senses quickened by the yet finer eyes and ears of Dorothy, the growing life of flower and tree, his Nature was needlessly out of touch with the naturalist's. His eye was drawn to the daisy or the celandine by their simplicity,

or their pathos ; but he did not know the rapture of Lucretius in the knowledge of their causes. He looked on the scientific masters of his day not with the beautiful humility of Virgil, but with contemptuous unconcern. Virgil had gently pleaded the case of those who approach Nature not through knowledge but through worship; and the Virgilian cult at certain points both resembles and supplements Wordsworth's. All three poets sought through Nature to uplift or succour Man. Lucretius saw in the comprehension of the inexorable order of the universe the means of purifying man's heart of superstition and passion. Virgil approached Nature with the tender and beautiful ' religion ' adumbrated in the sanctities of the Latin countryside; but the '*divini gloria ruris*' was to be realized only by labour and prayer. In Wordsworth's approach to Nature labour plays no such vital part. *The Excursion* is not a ' Georgics ' but—an Excursion. He neither, like Carlyle, idealizes labour, nor, like the homely author of the *Works and Days*, holds ' sweat ' to be the only way to virtue. His peasants are not fortunate because they live by labour, or the less fortunate because the soil of Lakeland answers with less facility than that of Lombardy to the spade and hoe. Nature is benign as well as ' just ', and moulds their forms and minds by the unconscious power of beauty. Even the decrepit old Beggar, a mere flicker of expiring life, shares in her benignity, in the quiet and the calm of her ' mute insensate things'. But for men and women in general, he saw in the absorbed vision of Nature the source of a noble rapture, of that ' ecstasy ' which Longinus declared to be the end of poetry, but which could also, like a religion, ' take men out of themselves '; uplifting the vacant and the vain, and arousing the sensual from their sleep of

death. Of that 'Natural Religion', as much a new beginning in human history, said Frederick Myers, as the 'Sermon on the Mount', Wordsworth is, for all attuned minds the prophet, 'Tintern Abbey' and the first 'Prelude' the gospel. The religion remains, as other religions remain, when the theologies which formulated them have disappeared; for whatever perishable elements mingle in Wordsworth's transcendent thinking, he found for what is most vital in it a language which 'speaks of nothing more than what we are'.

A generation, even a decade, ago, such claims might have been more readily slighted, or dismissed. Two phenomena of our time have contributed to the continued recognition of the enduring greatness and significance of Wordsworth in a time which has watched the fall of so many Victorian divinities. What is called 'the new classicism' is directed against many of those 'romantic' idols which Wordsworth assailed in his Prefaces and elsewhere. It tends to seek the very inmost quality of poetry in a bare fidelity to reality, and simplicity of expression. The full extent of the path we have trodden in the last three-quarters of a century is apparent when we find Matthew Arnold, a confessed Wordsworthian, declaring that 'Wordsworth has no style', and Mr George Rylands, the author of a recent book of some repute, *Words and Poetry*, retorting: 'Where is style to be found if not in poetry? where is poetry, if not in Wordsworth?' A fellow-critic of the same school, author of a notable book on Prose, Mr Herbert Read, declares that he 'would always send out "The Solitary Reaper" into the world of letters to represent the quintessence of English poetry'. We do not discuss these opinions, merely note their significance.

In another, widely remote, field, the naturalism of Wordsworth has received unexpected and authoritative recognition. Science, before the close of the nineteenth century, was generally held to have shaken the hold of 'Natural' as of other religions upon the cultivated mind. Tennyson had established 'Nature red in tooth and claw' as the accepted belief of poetic orthodoxy. Some of these changes may be permanent. Evolution, and all that it involves (though not all that it is often supposed to involve), however qualified or restated, is unlikely to be disproved. Wordsworth's interpretation of Nature has nevertheless been taken seriously in our time, in the most unexpected quarters. One of the foremost mathematical physicists of the day, Professor A. N. Whitehead, has not only called express attention to Wordsworth's interpretation of Nature, but welcomed it as a precious contribution to any complete apprehension of the real world.[1] Nor is it only the ideas to which he attaches this value. The poet's approach to Nature, the approach through imaginatively exalted sensibility, is declared to be as indispensable as the scientific approach, by way of experiment and deductive reasoning, to a complete account of her. And Wordsworth is, with Shelley, the poet whom he has chiefly in view. That 'both Shelley and Wordsworth emphatically bear witness that Nature cannot be divorced from its æsthetic values', is the thesis elaborated in an entire chapter of his *Science and the Modern World*. That ecstatic contemplation may be one of the avenues by which we 'see, if see we do, into the heart of things', was taught us by Plato long ago. It may be that there is here foreshadowed a closer bond in which science

[1] A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Lowell Lectures), chap. V.

and poetry, 'great allies', will pursue together, however far apart, the quest of Truth; a bond which Plato himself, transcending with the instinct of genius the antagonisms of common sense, unconsciously realized, when he built upon the mathematics of Pythagoras the philosophy of the universe which made him, for all time, the master of idealists.

# CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PRINCIPAL WORKS

| | Composed | Published |
|---|---|---|
| An Evening Walk | 1787–8 | 1793 |
| Descriptive Sketches | 1790–2 | 1793 |
| Guilt and Sorrow | 1794 | 1798–1842 |
| The Borderers | 1795–7 | 1842 |
| Reverie of Poor Susan | 1797 | 1800 |
| We are Seven (Lyrical Ballads) | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| The Thorn | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| Expostulation and Reply | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| The Tables Turned | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| Goody Blake | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| The Idiot Boy | 1787–8 | 1798 |
| Anecdote for Fathers | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| Simon Lee | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| Lines written in Early Spring | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey | 1797–8 | 1798 |
| Peter Bell | 1798 | 1819 |
| The Old Cumberland Beggar | 1798 | 1800 |
| Nutting | 1799 | 1800 |
| A Poet's Epitaph | 1799 | 1800 |
| The Two April Mornings | 1799 | 1800 |
| Three Years She Grew | 1799 | 1800 |
| The Fountain | 1799 | 1800 |
| Lucy Gray | 1799 | 1800 |
| Ruth | 1799 | 1800 |
| The Brothers | 1800 | 1800 |
| Michael | 1800 | 1800 |
| Poems on the Naming of Places | 1800 | 1800 |
| Lyrical Ballads, Vol. II, with Preface | 1800 | 1800 |
| Hartleap Well | 1800 | 1800 |
| Translations from Chaucer | 1800 | 1820–42 |
| The Sailor's Mother | 1802 | 1807 |
| The Small Celandine (two poems) | 1802 | 1807 |
| Resolution and Independence | 1802 | 1807 |

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|---|---|---|
| Sonnets : | | |
| I grieved for Buonaparte | 1802 | 1807 |
| Westminster Bridge | 1802 | 1807 |
| Calais | 1802 | 1807 |
| Toussaint Louverture | 1802 | 1807 |
| O Friend I know not | 1802 | 1807 |
| Milton, thou shouldst be living | 1802 | 1807 |
| It is not to be thought of | 1802 | 1807 |
| When I have borne in memory | 1802 | 1807 |
| Stanzas written in a Pocket copy of Thomson's Castle of Indolence | 1802 | 1815 |
| Yew Trees | 1803 | 1815 |
| To H. C. six years old | 1802 | 1807 |
| Memorials of a Tour in Scotland : | | |
| At the Grave of Burns | 1803 | 1807 |
| Thought suggested the day following | 1803 | 1807 |
| To a Highland Girl | 1803 | 1807 |
| Stepping Westward | 1803 | 1807 |
| The Solitary Reaper | 1803 | 1807 |
| Rob Roy's Grave | 1803 | 1807 |
| Yarrow Unvisited | 1803 | 1807 |
| The Blind Highland Boy | 1803 | 1807 |
| Sonnets : | | |
| ' England ! the time is come ' | 1803 | 1807 |
| To the Men of Kent | 1803 | 1807 |
| In the Pass of Killiekrankie | 1803 | 1807 |
| Anticipation. October 1803. | 1803 | 1807 |
| Lines on the expected Invasion | 1803 | 1807 |
| To the Cuckoo | 1803 | 1807 |
| She was a Phantom of delight | 1804 | 1807 |
| I wandered lonely as a cloud | 1804 | 1807 |
| The Small Celandine (third poem) | 1804 | 1807 |
| Ode to Duty | 1804 | 1807 |
| Fidelity | 1804 | 1807 |
| To a Skylark | 1805 | 1807 |
| Incident characteristic of a Favourite Dog | 1805 | 1807 |
| Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm | 1805 | 1807 |
| Dear Child of Nature, let them rail | 1805 | 1807 |
| Vaudracour and Julia | 1805 | 1820 |
| The Prelude | 1798–1805 | 1850 |
| The Recluse | 1800 | 1814, 1888 |
| Character of the Happy Warrior | 1806 | 1807 |
| The Horn of Egremont Castle | 1806 | 1807 |
| Stray Pleasures | 1806 | 1807 |
| Power of Music | 1806 | 1807 |
| Star-gazers | 1806 | 1807 |
| Yes, it was the mountain echo | 1806 | 1807 |

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|---|---|---|
| Sonnets: | | |
| Nuns fret not | 1806 | 1807 |
| Personal Talk (four sonnets) | 1806 | 1807 |
| A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by | 1806 | 1807 |
| Another year, another mighty blow | 1806 | 1807 |
| Loud is the Vale | 1806 | 1807 |
| Translations from Michelangelo | 1806 | 1807 |
| Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood | 1803–6 | 1807 |
| Sonnets: | | |
| Thoughts of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland | 1807 | 1807 |
| To Thomas Clarkson | 1807 | 1807 |
| Gipsies | 1807 | 1807 |
| O Nightingale, thou surely art | 1807 | 1807 |
| Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle | 1807 | 1807 |
| The White Doe of Rylstone | 1807 | 1815 |
| Tract on the Convention of Cintra | 1808 | 1809 |
| Sonnets: | | |
| Hoffer (six sonnets) | 1809 | 1815 |
| Hail Zaragoza! if with unwet eye | 1809 | 1815 |
| Essay on Epitaphs | 1809 | 1809 |
| Guide through the District of the Lakes | 1810 | 1810 |
| Epitaphs translated from Chiabrera | 1810 | 1810, 15, 37 |
| The Excursion | 1795 | 1814 |
| The power of armies is a visible thing | 1811 | 1815 |
| Laodamia | 1814 | 1815 |
| Dion | 1814 | 1820 |
| Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1814: | | |
| Yarrow Visited | 1814 | 1820 |
| Sonnets: | | |
| To Haydon | 1815 | 1816 |
| Brook, whose society the Poet seeks | | 1815 |
| Surprised by joy—impatient as the wind | | 1815 |
| Ode: General Thanksgiving | 1816 | 1816 |
| Ode | 1816 | 1816 |
| Composed upon an Evening of extraordinary Splendour and Beauty | 1818 | 1820 |
| Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820 | | |
| On approaching the Staubbach, 1820 | | 1822 |
| The River Duddon, a Series of Sonnets | 1820 | 1822 |
| Ecclesiastical Sonnets | 1821 | 1822–35 |
| To a Skylark | 1825 | 1827 |
| Sonnets: | | |
| Scorn not the Sonnet | 1827 | 1827 |
| Rotha, my spiritual child! | 1827 | 1827 |

## WORDSWORTH

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yarrow Revisited | 1831 | 1837 |
| Sonnet: On the departure of Sir W. Scott from Abbotsford | 1831 | 1837 |
| The Trossachs | 1831 | 1837 |
| Most Sweet it is with unuplifted eyes | 1833 | 1835 |
| Extemporary Effusion upon the death of James Hogg | 1835 | 1836 |
| Memorials of a Tour in Italy | 1837 | 1842 |
| Sonnet: Protest against the Ballot | 1838 | 1838 |
| Sonnets upon the Punishment of Death | 1839 | 1841 |
| Evening Voluntaries | 1846 | 1850 |

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